

CORA *the* PET *of the* REGIMENT

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LAURA JEAN LIBBEY

Jessie B. Conway, M. D.

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CORA,

The Pet of the Regiment

BY

MISS LAURA JEAN LIBBEY



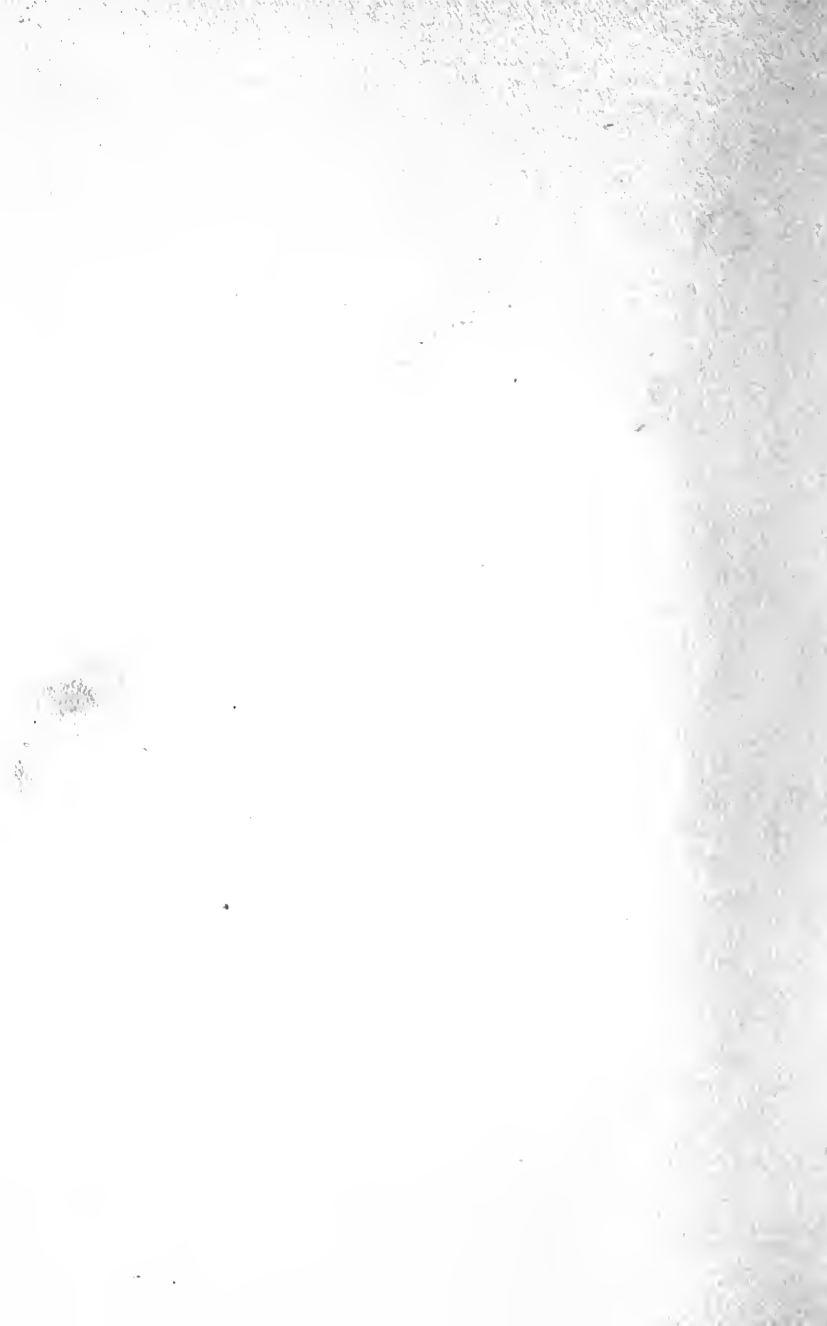
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CORA, THE PET OF THE REGIMENT

CHAPTER I.

"MY DAUGHTER SHALL NEVER HAVE A LOVER WHILE I LIVE!" SAID THE OLD GENERAL, FIERCELY. "I WILL GUARD HER FROM THEM, IF I HAVE TO MAKE A PRISON OF THESE FOUR WALLS, AND NEVER LET HER SEE ANY OTHER HUMAN FACE THAN MINE!"

"So you would like to enter the military school at West Point, eh?" said General Ormsby, slowly, as he keenly eyed the handsome young man before him; adding: "I am rather surprised to hear that. When you saved my precious young daughter's life yesterday, at the risk of your own, when through fright she stumbled and fell headlong directly in front of one of the trolley cars that was rushing along at tremendous speed, and would have been crushed to death in another instant of time but for your act of heroism——"

The old general's voice grew husky with emotion. He stopped short; he could not finish the sentence for a moment; words failed him.

Turning abruptly in his chair, he raised his eyes to the portrait of a young and lovely girl, fair as a dream,

that hung on the opposite wall, and his bronzed, weather-beaten old face blanched, and his strong hands trembled as he strove to control his emotions. The young man looked up at the pictured girlish face, too, and his color deepened.

After a moment's pause, the general went on slowly:

"The message I sent you was, 'Ask any favor in reason of me, and if it is within my power it shall be granted.' I supposed you would think it a good opportunity to be set up in business for yourself, as I hear you have been searching in the city for a situation, and without success. I repeat that I am surprised to hear you say that you would like to go to West Point."

"It has been the one dream of my life, sir," responded Arthur Rollins, raising his frank, dark eyes, the warm color coming and going on his cheeks, his form trembling with eagerness—"my one ambition; but I never supposed that I, a poor farmer's son, with only a limited education, would ever live to see that fond dream realized. The exciting life of a soldier has a wonderful charm for me. My heart and soul would be in it. I wouldn't mind entering the service as a private, and by dauntless courage and hard work win my spurs and my way to the front, rise to a captain, then a colonel, and perhaps some day I might be a general to rule an army, if a war should break out."

General Ormsby smiled quietly at the enthusiasm of the handsome youth of one-and-twenty standing before him in all the bravery of his noble manhood, saying to himself "that a finer young fellow would certainly be hard to find."

For a few minutes the general studied the pattern of

the carpet attentively; then looking up, he said, suddenly:

"We need more brave young men at West Point. We have too many milk-sops there who have gained an entrance through influence or money; men who never expect to see a battle, and who are so cowardly they would run if a musket were pointed at them. They think before they get there that they are going to have a lazy life of it. They soon have the starch taken out of them when they go into training, and suffer the hardships of patrol duty—shouldering a heavy musket for thirty-six hours, with never a wink of sleep; standing knee-deep in water for long hours, or lying on the hard earth, wrapped only in an army blanket, with the thermometer below zero, and exposed to the wind and weather from dusk to dawn; leaping on flying steeds; suffering hunger, thirst and privation for days; or if there is a riot, called out to face death in charging upon the mob."

"I would not mind hardship, sir," declared young Rollins. "When one is poor one is used to it in one way or another."

"And then there is another thing. No soldier should ever fall in love—or marry," added the general, slyly. "They are often ordered out upon the frontier, and their sweethearts, or even wives, must be left behind."

The general's warning, that the young man who mapped out a military career for himself should never fall in love, had been given too late. Arthur Rollins' heart had already gone from him—he was hopelessly in love at first sight with the general's daughter.

It never occurred to him that he should ever see her again, or have the opportunity of trying to win her. He said to himself he had met his ideal, that he should love

her in secret, and hopelessly, until the day that he died, and never care to look upon another girl's face.

There was the sound of a sweet, silvery girlish voice in the corridor without. General Ormsby heard it and started.

"Well, young man," he said, hurriedly, "I shall see that your wishes are granted, if it be possible. There happens to be a vacancy at West Point from my district—the congressman from my vicinity informed me. You shall take the place of the cadet who has just been transferred, providing—and it is a very important proviso—you can pass the examination satisfactorily. Getting into West Point is not a question of money or influence. A young man stands entirely on his own merits. The congressman from my district shall propose your name, however, and we can but hope for the result."

"I thank you with all my heart, sir," replied Arthur, rising to his feet, "more than words can express. I shall feel that whatever I attain in the future will be due to you. Please believe that my gratitude is unbounded."

"I shall notify you in the course of a fortnight in regard to the matter," said the general, rising and holding out his hand.

There was nothing else to do but shake hands and bow himself out, although the young man would have given anything he possessed to have stayed long enough to meet once more the lovely young girl tripping lightly down the corridor; but as he was not asked to do so, there was nothing else to do but to take his leave.

The door had scarcely closed behind the young man ere the *portières* on the opposite side of the apartment were thrust aside by a white hand, and a lovely young

girl, fair as the morning itself, burst into the room like a bit of bewildering sunshine.

"Oh, here you are, papa!" cried the girl, springing into the old general's outstretched arms. "I have been looking everywhere for you, you old darling!"

"And now that you have found me, what is it you want?" he asked, drawing the girl closer into his arms and stroking back the golden curls from her dimpled face.

"I want to show you the invitation I have just received for the grand ball the cadets are going to give at West Point; I'll tell you about it later; but first I want to know who it was that was with you a moment since in the library?"

"It was Mr. Arthur Rollins, the young man who did us both the greatest service of our lives yesterday," he answered. "He came here in response to a message from me."

"It was a wonder you did not summon me to the library, too, that I might thank him in person," she returned in a tone of great disappointment. "I—I shall probably never see him again *now*."

"Your letter of sincere gratitude was all-sufficient, my dear Cora," returned the general, gravely.

That Cora Ormsby was the idol of his life, the sunshine and delight of his old age, was little to be wondered at, in addition to being as lovely a creature as poet ever sung about or artist painted. She was a bright and jolly young girl, full of mirth and coquetry, with a laugh like a joy-bell. Every one loved her and helped to spoil her.

She never remembered what having a mother was like—the girl had been brought up in an atmosphere of gov-

ernesses and tutors; but they had not clouded over the sunshine of her nature, and at seventeen she was wayward and willful, but intensely lovable.

The old general prided himself on the fact that he had never yet said "No" to his idolized darling. The time was coming when the utterance of that word was to cost him the severest pang of his life.

The general had married late in life, and his marriage had come about in a strange way. He had been known to be a confirmed bachelor; his servants were all men; he had no patience with the frivolity of womankind—he held them in supreme indifference; every woman might have been swept from the face of the earth for all he cared—he would not have missed them.

Suddenly he was called to the bedside of a dying comrade, and because he could not find it in his heart to say "No" at such a time, he found himself made the guardian of an orphaned daughter.

He was home on a furlough, and the question which perplexed him sorely was—what should he do with her when he returned to the army, two weeks later? The good minister of the parish suggested:

"Why not marry her, if she will have you?"

"But I am old enough to be her father," declared the general.

"Perhaps she would overlook that," was the reply.

"I could never have the courage to ask her such a question," said the hero of a hundred battles, desperately, and flushing very red.

The minister took the task of proposing for the general upon his own shoulders; and the general looked at him in helpless bewilderment when he was informed, a few days later, that the young girl had said "Yes."

The upshot of the matter was he married her, and after a week of unalloyed happiness he went back to his army, leaving his young bride behind.

Nine months later he received an urgent telegram calling him home from the far West; but he arrived too late—his young wife had passed away, and they placed in his arms the little babe she had left as a legacy to him, to comfort him and solace his old age.

General Ormsby lived for the child alone from that moment—he could not bear to have her out of his presence for a day. When he returned to the army again, the little one and a faithful old nurse went with him.

The laughing, golden-haired, merry child became the pet of the regiment; there was not a soldier but would have laid down his life to serve the dainty little fairy.

She learned to use a musket with the best of them, and to ride the wildest horse like a young Diana.

General Ormsby was greatly relieved when he was recalled East, and could bring his little daughter into civilization again, before she was quite sixteen.

Then began the siege of making a lady of the wayward little beauty, and it was certainly the hardest battle the old general ever fought.

She pleaded so sweetly, and coaxed him so lovingly to let her throw away her books and send the governess and tutors away when she was quite sixteen, that he couldn't say nay, though it was contrary to his better judgment.

After that she ruled the old mansion, the servants, Miss Bitterwood, the housekeeper, and the old general, according to her own sweet will. Wise people shook their heads gravely and wondered how it would end. Miss Bitterwood's lamentations were loud and deep that harm would yet come of such willfulness.

"What if she should ever fall in love and marry, and leave you?" some one once asked the old general.

The effect of those words was alarming. It was the first time such a possibility had ever presented itself to his mind.

"I—I think I can manage that," he said. "Cora shall never have a lover while I live; I will guard her from them, if I have to make a prison of these four walls, and never let her see any other human face than mine!"

CHAPTER II.

FOR ONE MOMENT HE HELD THE SLENDER FORM IN HIS ARMS.

Meanwhile, Arthur Rollins walked hurriedly down the country road, for he had barely time to reach the depot and take the train back to the city from which he had come in response to General Ormsby's telegram, that he would like to see at his villa up in Cranstons-on-the-Hudson the young man who had saved his daughter's life, quite as soon as he could make it convenient to take the trip up from Brooklyn.

When the young man had crossed the Brooklyn Bridge in search of something to do on that fated day, having failed hopelessly in the great metropolis, he little dreamed that it was the hand of fate leading him on to his destiny.

Arthur had scarcely proceeded a dozen blocks ere his attention became riveted on a pretty young girl walking with an elderly lady just ahead of him.

The woman was quite as old and homely as the girl

was sweet and pretty, and he judged by her severe aspect that she was probably the girl's chaperon.

They were crossing the street toward the opposite pavement—the lady in advance, the girl following, when suddenly there was a terrible cry and a shout.

The motorman of a trolley car had lost control of the power, and his car was crashing down upon the girl at a terrific speed. The shout seemed to fairly paralyze the girl. The cries of the people turned to groans of horror as they saw before their mind's eye the awful tragedy that must take place before their gaze in another instant of time.

Arthur Rollins gave a great gasp as he took in the appalling situation, and the thought that flashed through his brain was—I will save her, or die in the attempt.

The crowd of spectators that stood looking on with bulging eyes and faces white as death saw the young man make a desperate leap, catch the girl in his arms as he dashed past her, and in another instant of time the car had rushed past the spot where the terrified girl had stood. But he had saved her—not a hair of the lovely golden head was hurt—and the life that throbbed through her she owed to him.

Her companion received the girl from his arms, almost hysterical with fright. From her incoherent words he learned that his surmise had been correct—she was the girl's governess and chaperon—that they had been visiting friends in the city, and were going over to the Grand Central Depot in New York on their way home to Crans-ton-on-the-Hudson.

They had stopped on their way to do a little shopping, and were just crossing over to the opposite pavement to reach their carriage when the rescue took place.

“General Ormsby will reward you handsomely for the great service you have rendered his daughter Cora as soon as he hears of this,” said the lady at parting. “Go to him at once when he sends for you. He is a great general, and worth his millions, and he loves his daughter better than his life.”

Arthur stoutly declared he would accept no pecuniary reward whatever, and very reluctantly gave his card.

His sole reason in promising to call upon General Ormsby was the hope of meeting his lovely daughter again.

But the interview was over, and he had not seen the fair young girl. In this Arthur felt grievously disappointed, despite the fact that the great old general had promised him that the fond dream of his life should be realized—he should enter West Point, and that speedily, too, providing he could pass the examination.

And so it came to pass, after a fortnight’s hard study day and night, in which Arthur put in more hard work than many another young man in twice as many months, coached by the general, that Arthur was summoned before the officers in charge.

His heart fell like lead when he found there a score or more of applicants for the one vacancy. Three days of suspense—terrible to our hero—in which he learned for the first time that money, position or influence did not count at West Point, that every young man must stand on his own merits to win or fail—three days during which he scarcely ate or slept—and then he received word that he, the poorest, most dependent of them all, had gained the victory over his competitors, and was named as the successful candidate.

Two days later Arthur Rollins was duly installed as one of the cadets at West Point.

Arthur was such a jovial fellow the cadets took to him at once.

"You are just in time for the grand ball," they declared; "but," said one of them, confidentially, "let me whisper a little secret in your ear, Rollins. You already have a bitter enemy in camp in Captain Lindsay. The story of your bravery in saving old General Ormsby's lovely daughter Cora caused quite a flutter among the cadets here, for every one knows how romantic little love affairs generally spring out of just such incidents, and every one knows that Captain Lindsay is over head and ears in love with the bewitching beauty. Well, the upshot of the matter was, some of the boys chaffed the captain about it. He turned white to the lips. 'Let the fellow have a care!' he returned, fiercely. 'If he *dare* make love to Cora Ormsby, it will be war to the knife between us!' And, to make the matter worse, you will be under his command."

Arthur Rollins threw back his head proudly.

"If we are to be rivals, so be it," he answered. "Captain Lindsay will find that I will not flinch. Why should I deny the truth? My heart went out to the general's daughter at first sight. I will win her if I can."

"You had better go about it slyly," said one of the cadets; "and I wouldn't advise you to dance with her at the ball."

"That is exactly what I intend to do, if she will dance with me," returned Arthur, spiritedly. "He will find me a man, every inch of me, and a two-edged sword which he had better not fool with."

The cadets voted that Arthur had spunk enough to

carry him through; and they declared that they would rather see Arthur win her than the captain, who was purse-proud and cordially detested for his *hauteur* and arrogance by every cadet in the academy.

Every young cadet's heart beat high, for there was scarcely one of them but expected a sweetheart or perhaps a *fiancée* at the ball.

Two pairs of eyes eagerly scanned the faces of the hundreds of visitors.

"Cora is not here," muttered Captain Lindsay.

"She is not here," said Arthur to himself.

In the hearts of both men flashed the thought that she would be sure to be at the ball later on.

At the grand mansion of General Ormsby, scarcely ten minutes' walk distant, just this side of the village of Cranstons, in an upper room dainty as any princess's *boudoir* could be, Cora Ormsby sat in a velvet arm-chair, sobbing as though her heart would break. She could hear the far-off sound of the bugle, the drum, and the fife, and the sound made the blood leap through the girl's veins like wine.

"It's a shame that I can't go and see the drill," sobbed the girl, clinching her little white hands, "and can not go to the ball in the evening, when I would give anything in the world to be there!" and again her voice was choked with a torrent of sobs.

There was a light tap on the door, and the next moment Frankie Belknap—Cora's school chum—burst hurriedly into the room.

"Why, what is it I hear, Cora?" cried her friend, clasping Cora in her arms with a resounding smack. "Ain't you really going to the great military ball to-night?"

The general's daughter shook her head.

"Why, how is that?" cried Frankie, in amazement. "You'd be the belle of the ball, I am sure."

"Papa was suddenly called away on business the very day after I spoke to him about the ball, and, of course, I was left in charge of mean, prim old Miss Bitterwood, the housekeeper here. She knew very well where papa had gone, and that he wasn't expected back for a month. She *must* have known it, for he had a long talk with her, the servants said, an hour or more before he started. That was in the morning, before I was up. Every time I asked her about when papa was to return, she put me off with some evasive answer. At last she came boldly out and told me papa had left word that I must not go to that ball under any circumstance. Now, I don't believe he told her that; he would not have been so cruel when he knew I had set my heart on it."

"I don't believe he did either," declared Frankie, impatiently. "Mean old Miss Bitterwood only wants to tyrannize over you, simply because you are left in her charge and she has the power."

"I am sure of it," sobbed Cora, crying as though her heart would break.

"I am going, and when I'm dancing and having the grandest time in the world, I'll think of you buried up in this lonesome old house. All the cadets will be asking for you, so will that handsome young fellow who saved your life. Shall I take any message from you to him?"

CHAPTER III.

THE CADETS GAY BALL AND ITS FATAL ENDING.

The June evening was drawing to a close; for an hour or more after her friend, Frankie Belknap, had left her, Cora sat by the open window, leaning her golden curly head on her white arms, sobbing as though her heart would break.

The sun went down and the dusk crept up; one by one the stars fixed themselves in the blue sky overhead, and a new moon, like a bright jewel, was peeping over the tall beech-trees that lined the grounds which surrounded Ormsby Villa.

The music had ceased. Cora knew that the cadets were by that time in the mess-room.

In a little while the ball would open, and then—oh, the torture of it!—the grand march would begin—the handsome young cadets would soon be whirling away to the mad, merry mazes of the dance. Cora could picture it vividly. Ah! there it was! The music struck up. The wind was blowing in the direction of the villa. She could hear it, and all the fire in the girl's nature swept through her heart.

The general's daughter sprung to her feet, her heart beating, every pulse in her body throbbing to the measure of the music in intense excitement.

"Because *she* is too old to enjoy herself, why should she prevent me from going?" panted Cora. "It is not right."

She caught up a light scarf, and, throwing it over her disordered curls, stole noiselessly from the house.

She had no idea of entering the ball-room, though the

white lawn dress, dotted here and there with blue corn flowers, and wide blue silk sash, which girdled her slender waist, which was her every-day apparel, was certainly as sweet and dainty as many of the girls would wear to the ball as their best finery.

But Cora never dreamed that any one would see her as she hurried down the long sloping hill and along the road, reaching the scene of the festivities quite breathless ten minutes later, just as the band struck up another bewildering waltz.

A few minutes' uphill walk, and the road turned to the left near the top of the bluff.

Before her was the long, gray, massive façade of the riding-hall; another climb, and Cora crept into the foot-path, up the steep and rounded terrace.

Directly ahead of her, its great windows brilliantly lighted, was the gray stone structure, with its arched door-way and broad flight of steps in the center, in which they were giving the grand ball, the music floating out to her in bewildering strains.

The girl had scarcely proceeded a dozen steps ere the command "Halt!" fell suddenly upon her startled ear, and the next moment a sentry stepped quickly before her from out the shadow of the trees.

"Oh, how you frightened me!" cried Cora. "I—I only want to look in at the ball. I don't want to go in and dance. Of course, you don't know me, but I'll tell you who I am—I am General Ormsby's daughter."

The sentry did not need to be told that. With a little surprised cry, the handsome cadet had dropped back.

"Miss Ormsby!" he cried, hoarsely. "Is this indeed you? I—I was just thinking about you, wondering if you were inside among that gay throng, enjoying yourself."

Don't you know me?" he cried, bending eagerly forward, raising his cap with one hand and extending the other.

"Oh, you couldn't be—Arthur—Mr. Rollins!" cried Cora, her girlish heart all in a flutter.

"You have guessed my identity," he answered. "I had no idea that you would recognize me, even if fate let me meet you again."

"Why not?" asked the girl, promptly. She did not add that she had thought of, dreamed of no other face but his since the moment they had first met, that, awake or sleeping, she had thought of no one else but him. But before he had time to answer, she added, quickly: "Why are you a sentry out here, instead of enjoying yourself midst the lights and music of the ball-room inside?"

An angry flush crossed his face, and his dark eyes flashed.

"It is the work of the captain in command to keep me outside so that I could not enjoy the ball, and I like dancing so much!"

"How shameful!" cried Cora, indignantly. "I was kept away from the ball, too, and I like dancing quite as much as you do. Why, the music fairly turned my brain. I could not keep away. Will you promise never to betray my secret if I tell it to you?"

"Yes," he added, earnestly; "I would never divulge anything you might say to me, though the whole army, with drawn swords, commanded me to do so!"

"Well, then, I stole away from the house to come here, though Miss Bitterwood commanded me not to leave my room until she gave me leave to do so. Papa is away, you know, and I am left in her charge. When I ran out of the house I made up my mind to tell papa immediately upon his return; but it was not until I was quite here

that I realized how bitterly angry he would be. If he should take it into his head that I had willfully disobeyed a command which he had left with Miss Bitterwood, he would never forgive me. Promise that you will never reveal that I have come here to-night!"

"I promise," returned Arthur, solemnly. "You can trust me; I would give my life rather than betray you!"

"Oh, there is that heavenly waltz again!" cried the girl, enthusiastically, clasping her hands in delight. "Imagine this green velvet turf a smoothly waxed floor, and we gliding over it to the mad, merry music of the waltz! Oh, I would give anything for just one dance!"

"Would you?" cried the young cadet, dropping his musket—forgetting everything in his bewilderment save the presence of the gloriously beautiful young girl before him, with her fair, sweet face, so radiant in the golden starlight, turned eagerly up to his.

He forgot he was a soldier—a sentry on duty—forgot everything save the mad ecstasy of the moment.

"Would you really care so much for a little waltz?" he whispered.

She nodded her curly golden head, and a great sigh broke from the cherry-ripe lips. Almost before she was aware of it, for the second time in her life the same strong arms encircled her; the sweet, entrancing strains burst forth with a flood of melody that fairly intoxicated her senses, and the next instant over the velvety sward they glided to the gay measures of the "Bonny Bells of Scotland."

"I wish this waltz could last forever!" breathed the young cadet, holding the girl closer. "Don't you?"

"Yes," whispered the general's daughter. "It's quite

as nice as though we were in the ball-room with the rest."

"A thousand times nicer," declared Arthur. "It must have been fate that made us both meet here so unexpectedly. I have longed so much to see you just once more, to tell you——"

The sentence never was finished.

"Halt!" came the command, in a voice hoarse and furious with passion, and Captain Lindsay appeared suddenly upon the scene.

The word struck a terror to the hearts of the two who were dancing gayly across the greensward, under the light of the moon.

A gasp of dismay broke from the lips of Arthur Rollins, and, simultaneously, a cry of terror from the girl.

"Do not betray me!" she gasped; and in a flash she had torn her white hands from his clasp, and darted like a terrified fawn across the moonlit space, and was lost in a trice amid the shadows of the overarching trees.

"Who was that?" thundered the captain in a terrible voice.

"A young lady, sir," responded Arthur, huskily.

"I was well aware of that. I asked *who* that young lady was, and what brought her here!"

"I decline to answer," returned Arthur, raising his head proudly, and looking his superior officer full in the face.

"Do you dare defy me?" yelled the captain, fairly quivering with rage. Even in the faint moonlight Arthur could see that his face was distorted and livid, while flecks of foam stood out on his lips, so intense was his terrible passion. "I will wring it from your lips," he

cried. "You, a sentry, deserted your post! You shall be court-martialed for this—drummed out of West Point in disgrace!"

"I am willing to stand the trial, sir," returned Arthur, white to the lips.

His retort only maddened the captain the more.

"You are insolent!" he cried; "but you shall suffer for that as well! So you will not tell who the girl was, eh? Report at once to the adjutant at head-quarters. I shall find out for myself who it was!"

Captain Lindsay made a dash in the direction which Cora had taken.

Arthur's bayonet brought him to a quick standstill. It was *his* turn to cry "Halt!"

"Not one step!" cried Arthur. "You shall not pursue that girl. You shall not cross this lawn, except over my dead body!"

For an instant the word seemed to electrify the captain; but quick as a flash he recovered himself and sprung forward, throwing himself with all his weight upon Arthur.

The attack was so sudden and so unexpected that the bayonet fell from Arthur's hands, and at that instant the captain's saber flashed in the moonlight, and he made a lunge at the unarmed cadet's heart.

CHAPTER IV.

The sword with which Captain Lindsay lunged directly at Arthur Rollins' heart never reached its mark, for, quick as a flash, the young cadet caught the upraised arm

and sent the weapon whirling from his hand. The next instant they had closed in mortal combat. Back and forward over the greensward they swayed to and fro, like strong oaks bent by a whirlwind.

For the first time in his life Captain Lindsay, who was an expert athlete, found that he had met his match.

With one supreme effort Arthur threw him from him.

"Go!" he said, scornfully, and the captain was not slow to take advantage of the opportunity.

"You shall answer for this!" he hissed, as he gathered himself together and picked up his sword.

"I am at your service at any time," returned Arthur, coolly.

In another instant his adversary was lost among the shadow of the trees.

What Captain Lindsay would do the young cadet had not the least idea.

Slowly he resumed his pace up and down. He had threatened him with arrest and court-martial. Well, come what might, he would never betray Cora; they might pierce him with bayonets, torture him on the rack, but they could never tear from his lips the secret that would go down to the grave with him. Then, pacing up and down, he quite forgot his recent encounter with Captain Lindsay, in living over again the happy event which had caused it.

What a sweet little fairy she was! If he had been in love with her before he was doubly infatuated with her now. Those eyes bright as stars—a thousand times brighter than those which beamed above their head—had shot love's fatal dart straight through his heart.

She was an heiress and a great general's daughter, while he was a mere nobody, with fame and fortune all to make.

Was it not madness to think of her? He told himself that the first great lesson of his life must be to try to forget her. She was getting to have too much of a hold on his thoughts.

Meanwhile, Cora had fled homeward panting with terror.

When she arrived at her home she found the inhabitants of the villa in great commotion. What could have happened, she wondered, standing quite still in great affright.

She could see lights flashing to and fro; had her father come home, and had anything happened to him? Her heart stood quite still.

Quaking with horrible dread, Cora crept up to the porch; the door was unfastened, just as she had left it, and no one saw her as she glided into the entrance-hall and up the broad oaken stair-way to the corridor above. She had scarcely reached her room ere she heard quick footsteps. It was Miss Bitterwood, the housekeeper.

"I have been looking for you everywhere, Cora," she said, sharply; "where have you been?"

"Out enjoying the moonlight," answered the girl, hanging her head, a bright spot burning on either cheek.

"Humph!" exclaimed the housekeeper. "You had little to do, roaming out in the grounds by yourself. Your father sent me in search of you, and a pretty time I have had hunting you through the house."

"Oh, papa has got home, then?" cried Cora, joyously, bounding like a deer toward the door.

"Yes; he is in the library; but I want to tell you something before you go down."

The girl started. A guilty conscience needed no accuser. A burning flush swept over her face, her hands trembled.

"Your father is not alone," continued Miss Bitterwood. "There is a stranger with him—a lady."

"A lady?" repeated Cora, in amazement too great for words. "Why, who do you suppose it can be, Miss Bitterwood?"

"That we shall soon know," said the housekeeper, adding: "What would you say if you thought your father was bringing home a bride?"

"I would leave this roof this very hour!" cried the girl, imperiously. "I shall not go down, Miss Bitterwood, until you find out who is down there with my father!"

"But he is calling for you," said the housekeeper. "You must go down. Come, I will go with you."

"No!" cried Cora, in affright. "You must find out who it is with papa, or, better still, tell him to come up here to me. I must see him."

The housekeeper shook her head.

"If there are any battles to be fought, one might as well face them first as last," she said. "Be brave, and come right along."

Trembling with apprehension, Cora allowed herself to be taken down to the library. She clung close to the housekeeper.

"You must go in alone," she said.

And before Cora was aware of her intention, she had opened the door and had fairly thrust her in, closing it quickly after her.

"My dear little Cora!" cried the general, springing forward and clasping her in her arms, "I am so glad to see you once again. It seems an age since I have looked upon your face!"

Cora kissed her father, then she looked past him ap-

prehensively toward the veiled figure in the velvet chair opposite.

"Lyle," said the general, turning toward the slim figure, "this is my daughter Cora, of whom you have heard me speak. Bless me, how awkwardly I am getting at this matter!" cried the general. "This is Miss Lyle Warner, my ward, Cora—Lyle, this is my daughter."

Her father's ward!

Had her ears deceived her?

The stranger threw back her veil, and Cora saw standing before her the most beautiful girl she had ever beheld in all her life—a girl of about her own age, a little taller and slenderer, perhaps, with a wealth of blue-black, curling hair, a face like a wild red rose, cheeks like the crimson heart of a pomegranate blossom, cherry-ripe lips, and eyes black and luminous as midnight stars.

"Your ward, papa!" gasped the daughter, looking in bewilderment at the lovely young stranger.

"Yes," he answered, looking very strange and uncomfortable; "that is the business that took me to the city. I can not explain it to you now. I want you and Lyle to take to each other, and become the best of friends. She is to make her home with us, and share all your pleasures with you."

The beauty smiled, disclosing a row of pearly teeth.

"We are sure to be friends," she said. "I have heard so much about you, Cora, that it seems as though I already knew you."

Cora Ormsby did not feel quite sure of this. The face smiling down into her own was as beautiful as a dream, but there was something about the stranger that struck a chill to her heart, she could not tell why.

"Take Lyle up to your room, my dear," said the gen-

eral, turning to his daughter. "She will occupy your apartments with you to-night. To-morrow we will get the western wing ready for her, or any other suite of rooms in the house that she fancies."

The words sounded strange to his daughter's ears.

Together the two girls quitted the library and went slowly to Cora's room.

"Oh, what a beautiful *boudoir*!" cried the girl, as she followed Cora into the dainty blue and gold apartment. "Why, this is a veritable fairy bower," she added, sinking into the seat which Cora indicated. "I never for a moment dreamed that General Ormsby's home was as magnificent as this, and I did not know that you were a young lady. He always spoke of you as a child."

"This is my birthday, I am seventeen to-day," said Cora, quietly; "but tell me," she added, "how it happened that you are my father's ward? I—I never heard of it before."

Lyle's face flushed crimson.

"Perhaps it would be better for your father to tell you all about it," she said, constrainedly. "No doubt he will do so to-morrow."

During the half-hour's conversation that followed she seemed eager to learn all that she could concerning Cora's and the general's affairs, but was reticent in regard to her own.

"Perhaps you would prefer to have this room all by yourself to-night if you are tired," said Cora. "I think I will share the housekeeper's apartment for to-night."

"Please yourself," said Lyle.

"I will send a maid to you to see that you have everything that you require."

"Thanks; you are very kind," was the answer. Bidding her "good-night," Cora left the room, and the stranger was in possession of Cora's beautiful *boudoir*.

CHAPTER V.

There was a low tap at the door at that instant. The girl started. No doubt it was the maid whom the general's daughter said she would send to her.

"Come in," she drawled, wearily.

Instead of the maid whom she expected to see, Miss Bitterwood, the housekeeper, stepped quietly into the room.

"Hush!" she said, as the girl was about to speak. "Walls have ears; speak low. No one must know that we have ever met before."

"You have warned me about that so many times that it is not necessary to go over the ground again, I should fancy."

"It takes a great deal to drill a thing into your mind," answered the woman, contracting her brow into a heavy frown. "For years it has been the one dream of my life to see you sitting where you are to-night. Now it only remains for you to play yours cards well to become mistress of this magnificent house and the fortune of General Ormsby."

"It would take a pretty good fortune to make me marry an old gray-beard like that, Aunt Bitterwood," said the girl. "You kept his age from me; you cheated me into the belief that he was a much younger man than what I find him. He is old and baldheaded."

"I am trying to get a grand home for you, you silly girl, and the time will come when you will see what I am doing for you, you ungrateful hussy! I haven't the least doubt but that you'd be infinitely more pleased to get some ten-dollar-a-week clerk, to wash and bake and scrub for him; but after four or five years of it your eyes would be opened. Love doesn't last long when a woman has to pitch in and work hard for a man. Then you would cry out, 'Heavens! why didn't I marry a rich man?'"

"What a sordid old woman you are!" cried the niece. "No wonder you never married, or that no one ever fell in love with you!" twitted the girl.

"I could have married many and many a time, if I had wanted to take a poor man," declared Miss Bitterwood, grimly; "but I was no such fool as that."

"I suppose you endeavored all these years to get General Ormsby, and when you found out, after trying, that you had been on a fool's errand, then you want me to attempt it."

The elder woman flushed, and the girl well knew that her random remark had hit hard.

"We will talk on this subject to-morrow; but I warn you, if you want to get along with the general, to sway his heart and get his millions, you want to keep in with the daughter."

"I already see that will be an impossibility, and I haven't been under this roof an hour. We will clash at every point, I am sure. But, laying all business aside in our conversation, isn't this a beautiful room, aunt? Its furnishings must have cost a small fortune!"

"You won't find many to equal it. Every apartment in the mansion is furnished on the same grand scale. All

this goes to the daughter, providing the general does not marry again. It is late now; you must retire, so I will leave you. Now, think well over what I have said."

'A moment more and the door closed after the tall, angular form, and once more the girl found herself alone.

"It is indeed a grand thing to be rich," she murmured; "but in this case the sacrifice is almost too great. What a strange thing it is that Fate changes our destiny even in a day. If we hadn't stopped on our way from the depot to-night, to look in at the grand ball the cadets were giving, and I had not met that young man, my heart would have been untouched; but somehow, at the very first sound of his voice, I realized that he was my affinity. How brave and handsome he looked standing there in the moonlight! I wouldn't care how poor he was, I'd rather marry him, and live on a crust of bread, than to wed this old gray-beard, with all his millions! I did not catch the name when the general introduced him, and I was afraid to speak of it again, to let him see how much interest I had taken in the young man.

"Ah! but he was so handsome, so kingly! If there is such a thing as people realizing when they meet the one intended for them, I should say that he is mine.

"My aunt always told me that, with a face as beautiful as mine, I should make my fortune. I always thought that perhaps I could, if an opportunity were given me, and now the chance is mine at last. No, indeed, let aunt coax as much as she may, I shall not marry that horrid old gray-beard until I see if I can not capture that handsome young fellow first.

"How angry I am that I did not come here a week ago, and get a chance to attend the cadets' grand ball.

"I am glad I didn't marry any one of the poor clerks who were sighing for me, and almost fighting duels. I was intended for luxury, never for a poor man's wife.

"But I must not forget to make myself very agreeable to the old gentleman, in order to be permitted to stay here, where I can see him. If he once found out the interest I have taken in this handsome cadet, it would be bad for me—he would take no more interest in me."

CHAPTER VI.

Cora was up with the sun the next morning. 'As soon as she had arranged her simple toilet she hurried down to the dining-room, where she knew she would find her father.

The general was there with his papers.

"Oh, papa!" cried Cora, springing into his arms, "how glad I am to find you home once more. The old house has been almost like a prison since you've been away. I have actually counted the hours until you would return."

"Have you missed me so much, little girl?" he asked, stroking the golden head.

"More than tongue can tell," returned Cora.

The general had not been reading his paper that morning. He had been standing by the window engaged in deep thought. He had been wondering what Cora would say if she knew that he had proposed marriage to the beautiful young girl he had brought to the villa the evening before. He was wondering how he should find

words to disclose it when the inevitable hour for making it known should come.

Lyle had asked him to keep it a secret for a little while, and he must obey her wishes. When he told his daughter, perhaps there would be a little scene, a few tears, but it would end by her accepting the inevitable, and in time she would love the beautiful dark-eyed Lyle.

She was so sweet, so charming, that he did not see how his daughter could help it. She could not find any fault with her, unless it might be her youth. She was only a year or so older than Cora herself. He knew that she would say:

"Why, papa, you must be mad! She is young enough to be your granddaughter!"

But he would defend his position by saying he was not the first man by any means who had taken unto himself a young wife.

"When a widower marries, why should he wish to wed gray hairs and wrinkles when his heart is as young as ever?" he queried.

Suddenly, in the midst of his reverie, he remembered that his daughter was speaking to him.

"What is it you say, Cora?" he asked, straightening himself up and paying close attention.

"I was asking how in the world, papa, it happened that you had a ward and I never knew the existence of her."

She saw his face flush. He coughed uneasily, the morning paper rattled nervously in his grasp.

"Why, the fact is," said the general, slowly, "a few weeks ago I received a letter from a young girl down in the city, stating that she had just been left an orphan, with a small fortune, and she asked my advice as to how

to invest it, requesting me to keep her communication a secret from every one. Her father had been an army officer, she went on to say, and she had heard my name so often upon his lips that it did not seem to her that she was a stranger to me. She believed my advice would be straight from the heart, and she could put full confidence in me.

"I answered her letter in accordance with her request, and thought no more about the matter. Soon after I received a telegram from this young girl, asking me to please come to the city at once to advise with her, as she was in great distress.

"It so happened that I had an important business engagement in New York, and thinking that I could kill two birds with one stone, I took the next train. I went to the address indicated. It was a boarding-house. I confess, my dear, that I was shocked at the vision of girlish loveliness that came into the meagerly furnished parlor to greet me.

" 'Oh, General Ormsby,' she sobbed, putting out her hands, 'how good of you to come! But how can I ever tell you what has happened?'

" 'You had better get at the root of it at once, my dear child,' I suggested, a little bluntly, perhaps.

"Between tears and sobs I drew the truth from her at last. She had been inveigled by some swindling advertisement to invest all of her little fortune in a lottery scheme. She had drawn a blank. In a twinkling everything she had on earth was swept from her. Oh, how she wept! And you know I could never stand a woman's tears. I would rather face a whole regiment of soldiers with drawn swords.

" 'I do wish that I had put the money in your hands,'

she wailed; 'made you guardian of it. I am homeless and penniless. What shall I do?'

"All in a moment it occurred to me to make this pretty young girl my ward, and, as her guardian, bring her home with me."

He did not add that on the spot he had asked the girl to be his wife, and that she had said she must have a year to think it over before giving him her final answer, which she felt sure would be in the affirmative; still, she would not bind herself by a formal betrothal for that length of time.

"So I brought her home," he concluded, aloud. "She will be a brilliant acquisition to the household. To tell you the truth, my dear child, you need the association of some one thoroughly ladylike to teach you those little elegancies of deportment so very essential to a lady."

The girl drew back with flashing eyes.

"She can't teach me anything, papa," she cried. "I know quite as much as she does, even more, if anything."

"She is very cultured and refined," declared the general, irritably. "I wish you were like her. She has such a dignified pose; she attracted much attention on our journey here. If you want to please me, Cora, you will show her every consideration," this very sharply.

Cora's arms fell from about his neck. It was the first time in his life that he had ever spoken to her in that tone, and it cut to the girl's heart like the thrust of a sharp sword. Her pride would not let her appear to notice it.

"See that a place is provided for her at the breakfast-table. You must go to her room at once to see that she is up, and show her about the grounds—make her acquainted with the house. I will be awaiting you at the usual hour in the breakfast-room."

Without a word, Cora turned away to obey him. The girl's heart felt strangely heavy as she quitted the room.

Lyle was up and dressed when she tapped at the door.

"Good-morning," said Cora, hesitatingly, on the threshold, doubtful whether she would be welcome or not to enter her own *boudoir*. Lyle answered the salutation.

"I have just been hoping some one would come to me," she said. "I have been moping around for over an hour, hardly knowing what to do with myself."

"I am sorry," returned Cora. "I could have come to you long ago had I known you were up."

"I hope breakfast will soon be ready, for I'm as hungry as a bear," declared Lyle. "You must have splendid coffee; the odor of it came up here to me."

Cora started back in surprise. It quite amazed her to hear such a remark from the lips of a stranger. This certainly did not bear out her father's idea of culture and refinement, which he had credited to the lovely stranger.

"It must be perfectly lovely to live so near West Point," chattered Lyle. "I suppose you know all the cadets?"

"Pretty much," returned Cora.

"Do you believe there is such a thing as love at first sight," asked Lyle, suddenly and eagerly. "Tell me, do you?"

"Yes," said Cora, blushing like a red, red rose, "I think so; but Miss Bitterwood says that such an idea is ridiculous."

"She doesn't know anything about young girls' hearts," laughed Lyle.

Again it struck Cora that, for a stranger, she made

rather free remarks concerning members of the household.

As they opened the door of the breakfast-room, General Ormsby came forward to meet them. To Cora's amazement, she saw that he wore a red rosebud in his button-hole. The sight nearly caused her to drop to the floor. In all the years of her life she never remembered having seen her father wear a rose in the lapel of his coat before. He had always characterized the people who wore them as dudes and brainless fops. His face was flushed, and he was laughing and making remarks quite as silly as a school-boy might to pretty Lyle Warner.

Cora was alarmed. It almost seemed to her that she was in a dream. Her surprise knew no bounds when she saw him offer his arm gallantly to his companion, as a young carpet-knight might have done, and lead her to the table.

"What a beautiful rose you are wearing, General Ormsby!" cried the girl.

"Pray accept it," returned the general, with a low bow.

The next instant it was in Lyle's white fingers, and she was holding it to her red lips.

"This is the month of roses," he said. "The grounds and old-fashioned garden back of the house are running riot with the most gorgeous of blooms. After breakfast, I should be delighted to take you through the grounds. I think you will be pleased with the place," he said, with pride on his face and a touch of eagerness in his voice.

"I am sure I shall," she returned, with a dazzling smile.

During the meal Cora did not talk much; but her

father did not seem to notice it, so animated was he in his conversation with the handsome young stranger.

"Now I will show you the roses, if you are quite ready," said the general.

They passed out into the garden together.

Cora stood quite motionless, white as death, in the center of the spacious room. Her father had not invited her to accompany them; for the first time in his life he had forgotten her—simply forgotten her.

With trembling feet, Cora hurried to Miss Bitterwood's apartment, and flung herself into the housekeeper's arms, telling her what had occurred.

"Do not make a goose of yourself, my dear!" exclaimed the housekeeper, angrily. "Your father is only showing the young lady the most natural courtesy. It is but little wonder, she is so very beautiful. Why, there isn't a young man for miles around but would be delighted to step into his shoes. You must show her every courtesy; she is extremely aristocratic, and will make a fine companion for you to take about with you."

"I am very sure I shall not like her," faltered Cora, piteously.

"Why not, pray?" asked Miss Bitterwood, with asperity.

"I do not know just why, but somehow I feel it in my heart," she moaned. "I wish she had never entered this house. Somehow, she has cast a dull, gray shadow over it."

"Nonsense!" replied Miss Bitterwood. "She has brought sunshine and gayety into it. If you are wise, you will make a friend, not an enemy, of Ly—Miss War-

ner. She is sure to win all the cadets' hearts before she is here a month, and be the acknowledged belle of West Point."

CHAPTER VII.

"Yes, before a fortnight is over, beautiful Lyle Warner will be the acknowledge belle of West Point," repeated Miss Bitterwood, in a voice that had a very triumphant ring to it.

The words cut to Cora's heart like the thrust of a sharp sword.

How could she doubt it when even her father seemed to be so infatuated with the beautiful stranger.

There was something about her which Cora could not bring herself to like. When the two girls were alone together, the only subject which seemed to interest Lyle was the cadets.

During that week she insisted upon going every day to see them drill. Very eagerly she would scan each face, then she would look away with a disappointed air. The face she sought was not among them. One by one she inquired about, asking who he was—if his father were rich, and if he had a sweetheart, until Cora grew wofully tired of answering such questions. She took good care, however, not to make any of these remarks when the general was present.

"Have you no *beau-ideal* among the handsome cadets?" she asked of Cora one day. The girl blushed furiously, and managed to turn off the question without replying to it; but Lyle was not to be put off in this

manner. "Have you never had any love affair?" persisted Lyle.

"Yes," admitted Cora, reluctantly, at last. "I have met a young man whom I think the most splendid fellow the whole wide world holds!"

"Does he like you?" asked Lyle, anxiously.

Again Cora flushed crimson to the roots of her golden hair.

"He has never said so in so many words, but his eyes look it every time our glances meet."

"Promise you will not tell if I make a confidante of you," whispered Lyle, eagerly. "Do you think it strange for a young girl to fall in love with a young man whose very name she does not know?"

"I have heard often enough that love at first sight is not uncommon."

"Well, that is exactly what I have done," declared Lyle. "I am deeply in love with one of the cadets. I think he fell in love with me at first sight. I'd give anything to get an introduction to him."

"I'll speak to papa about it, and I'm sure he can bring it about."

"Oh, not on your life!" declared Lyle. "I wouldn't have him know it for anything in the world. He would think it terrible for a young lady to express a wish to get acquainted with a young man—old people have such queer thoughts, you know. Perhaps we can manage it without him. The first time we are together and see him, I will point him out. Perhaps we can get up a flirtation with him."

"A—a flirtation?" gasped Cora. "Surely you must be jesting; no respectable young girl would think of such a thing."

"I really didn't know they were such prudes out here," pouted Lyle. "New York girls don't think it so dreadful."

"Pardon me, yes, they do," answered Cora. "I know plenty of young girls who would make a terrible fuss if any young man should attempt to flirt with them."

"Why, your friends must all be prudes," sneered Lyle. "Why, *my* friends would think nothing of it, whatever," declared Lyle, with a toss of her head, and Cora fell to wondering what kind of girls Lyle's friends must be to do such a despicable thing as flirt with strangers.

During that fortnight Arthur Rollins had managed to see Cora frequently.

Her coming and going had attracted no attention whatever in the household; her place was quietly usurped by the stranger. It was Lyle who accompanied the general to the morning-room after breakfast was over, cut and read his papers for him, even going so far as to write his letters for him. Cora found to her great dismay that she was not even missed by the father who would not allow her out of his presence before.

There was one part of the grounds quite secluded from the main path, and which no member of the household ever frequented; to this spot Cora would steal away and throw herself down in the long grass, giving herself up to the bitterest tears that ever fell from mortal eyes.

Suddenly there was a step, a strong white hand pushed aside the interlacing branches, and Cora sprung to her feet just as Arthur Rollins, the handsome cadet, stepped into the little leafy bower. He had been attracted by the sound of violent weeping. His amazement knew no bounds when he saw Cora.

"Miss Ormsby—and in tears!" he cried, in great alarm. "What can it mean?"

"I—was not cry-cry-ing!" she sobbed, gulping down another sob which threatened to overcome her.

Arthur took her hands gently in his. Poor little hands, how cold they were, and how they trembled!

"There is something the matter," he said, very gravely. "Pray tell me what it is, and command me if there is any way in which I can serve you."

Cora shook her head and hid her face in her hands.

"It is really nothing," she persisted in a smothered voice. "I was a little lonesome. Every one gets lonesome once in awhile, you know."

"And, after the manner of your sex, you thought the only way to bring yourself to a cheerful state was to drown yourself in tears. But were you really so lonesome?"

"Yes," she admitted.

A thrill shot through his heart. It had been four days since he had seen her. Had that anything to do with it?

"Sit down on this fallen log," he said, "and let us talk a little while together. This is the first time we have had a chance to have a chat since the evening we had that never-to-be-forgotten, delightful dance in the grounds."

"Tell me," she asked, eagerly, catching her hands together, "did Captain Lindsay ever find out who it was that ran away so unceremoniously the night of the ball?"

"No," returned Arthur, lightly; "I refused to tell him. That is all there is to it."

He would not let her know of the terrible altercation that had followed, and how Captain Lindsay had strode away vowing the direst vengeance on him.

The blow had not as yet fallen. The young cadet had watched and waited ever since, not knowing in which direction his vengeance would fall upon him. His rage was like a tempest, gathering in fury with each succeeding day.

Each moment he was growing more desperately in love with her. How he longed to ask her if he might come to see her often, that he had thought of nothing, dreamed of nothing but her by night and by day! He was so taken up with Cora that he even forgot to ask after the health of the beautiful girl he had seen with her, and whom he heard was stopping with her at the villa.

He could think of nothing, talk of nothing but herself.

He learned that she came to the glade nearly every day alone, and he promised himself that he should come there too, if there was any way possible, little dreaming of the terrible tragedy that was to occur.

CHAPTER VIII.

'Arthur walked back to camp with a warm flush on his boyish face and a glad light in his eyes, whistling a merry tune. He was in love, thoroughly in love; and when a young man is in that state the world seems all *couleur de rose* to him.

During the half hour which he spent with Cora, his enemy was so near that he could hear all that passed between them, and his rage knew no bounds. He clutched his hands together to keep from parting the vines, springing in between them, and thrusting aside the handsome young cadet. He knew enough of human nature, how-

ever, to realize that this would only hurt his own cause with Cora. No; he must be more diplomatic than that.

There was but one way, and that was to disgrace him openly—ay, disgrace him so bitterly that he would never dare raise his head among his fellow-men.

Instead of going back to camp, the captain suddenly wheeled about and bent his steps toward the villa. He found the old general in the library.

“Good-afternoon, Lindsay,” said the bluff old general, warmly wringing the young man’s hand. “Delighted to see you, I am sure. I suppose you were strolling past and thought you would give me the pleasure of a little call?”

“No, general. I came here to see you on a special mission,” said the captain, a little confusedly.

“If it is a fair question, general, I should like to ask if you know this young cadet, Rollins, personally?”

“To be sure,” returned the old general. “I thought every one knew that. Why, I was the one, backed by the congressman from my district, who got him in. I think it is well known why I took such an interest in him. You know he once saved my dear little Cora’s life.”

“But did you inquire into his character very thoroughly, general?” asked the captain, very significantly.

General Ormsby started.

“Well,” he said, slowly, “he told me that he was born and brought up in the little village of Red Bank. He had come to New York to find a position, and brought letters of recommendation from the school-master and both of the ministers in the village. I did not investigate the authenticity of the letters. His fair, open countenance was all the recommendation I needed; and I flatter myself that I am a tolerably good judge of human nature.”

"But is it not possible for one to err at times?" murmured the captain.

General Ormsby looked at him.

"You speak in innuendoes. I do not like it. Come right out plainly and tell me what you have on your mind," said the general, bluntly.

"Well, in the first place, there is something about him which the cadets in his regiment do not understand. He does not make friends with them——"

"Well, well; what of that?" cut in the general, frowning.

"It would take pretty positive proof to make me think ill of this young man," he declared. "I will look into the matter."

The captain bowed; the conversation then drifted into other channels, and soon after Captain Lindsay took his leave.

It was toward the end of the season, and upon the following week they were to break up camp, and most of the cadets were to return to their homes.

To Captain Lindsay's intense rage, Arthur Rollins was invited by the general to be his guest during his vacation. In extending it, General Ormsby had but one thought, and that was to let the officers and cadets, one and all, see how thoroughly he trusted the young man. He quite forgot about Cora. It did not occur to him, until Arthur sent back his note of acceptance, and briefly acknowledged the general's kindness.

Two days later there was to be a lawn *fête* at a neighboring villa, and many of the cadets were to be present, Arthur Rollins among them.

Cora heard this with a glad throb at her heart. Lyle

listened eagerly while the general and his daughter were discussing the affair.

She said to herself how strange it would be if her hero should be there. If she but knew his name! Ah! that was the trouble. If she did not meet him soon she would fling prudence to the winds and ask the old general the name of the young cadet whom they had met and he had spoken to that evening. Never did a day break more auspiciously than the one on which the lawn *fête* was to take place.

Hundreds of young girls had looked forward to it, and uttered cries of delight as they opened their eyes and saw the sun shining warm and bright.

All the cadets who could get away were on the *qui vive* of expectancy, much to the annoyance of their fellows who were obliged to remain on duty. It was high noon when the beaus and belles began to arrive. The old general escorted Cora and Lyle.

"You will be the two prettiest girls at the lawn *fête*," he observed, eying them both critically.

Cora was dressed in simple white, with a pale-blue sash knotted about her slender waist, and a bunch of simple pansies at her belt and twined among her golden curls.

Lyle had never been to a lawn *fête* before; but rather than ask Cora, she followed her own idea, and almost took Cora's and Miss Bitterwood's breath away when she came down to join the general and his daughter, arrayed in a crimson silk dress veiled in black lace, and wearing all the jewelry which she possessed. Her critical eyes noted every detail of Cora's dress.

"She evidently goes in for simplicity," thought Lyle.

"Now, what chance will she stand in that dress compared with me?"

And her spirits rose higher and higher as they set out toward the scene of festivity.

Cora watched her beautiful companion, owing to herself that Lyle was certainly the most beautiful creature that she had ever beheld.

She wondered if Arthur Rollins would admire her. She half wished that she had not been invited to the lawn *fête*.

CHAPTER IX.

The entrance of the two beautiful girls on the grounds created quite a sensation.

"I think I shall have to go up to the porch and sit down and rest awhile," said the general, puffing and panting, "much as I should enjoy going through the grounds with you."

He began to realize for the first time in his life how firm a hand old age was laying upon him. Cora felt greatly distressed for him.

Lyle was secretly delighted. She had said to herself that she would not enjoy the lawn *fête* if the old octogenarian were to keep constantly at her elbow. She would improve her time to see and be seen while he was resting.

"Shall I not accompany you to the porch, papa, and sit with you until you are rested?" asked Cora, anxiously.

"No; you and Lyle can come back for me after awhile. Go and enjoy yourself. I will be a looker-on."

"I suppose you know every one here," said Lyle, her face flushing eagerly.

"I do not think there will be many strangers," replied Cora.

"Do not be surprised if I flirt desperately with the handsome cadets. Don't look so shocked. Your pained, puritanical face makes me laugh."

Seeing that Lyle was enjoying herself to the top of her bent, Cora excused herself a moment to see how her father was getting along.

While Lyle stood there chatting with a group of young girls and their escorts, she noticed with intense satisfaction how jealous and ill at ease all the girls were.

"They are never sure of their beaux when I am about," she thought, amusedly.

Suddenly some one touched her on the arm, and said:

"Miss Warner, I wish to introduce Mr. Arthur Rollins to you."

She turned a laughing face, and saw standing before her the handsome cadet who had haunted her very dreams, who had been in her thoughts every hour of the day since she had met him on the night of the cadets' great ball.

"I believe we have met before," she said, extending her hand.

Her dark eyes flashed with a brilliant light, and her crimson lips quivered with emotion. She was so completely transformed all in an instant that Arthur was startled by her loveliness.

"I was just about to make the same remark," said

Arthur, with a low bow; "but I hardly supposed that you would remember me."

Remember him! Lyle looked up into the handsome, laughing, debonair face, saying to herself that she should never forget him.

Arthur talked so freely, so gracefully, that she forgot everything in the charm of his presence.

"How warm the sun shines down in the grounds and how cool it looks down by the river," she said.

He took the hint at once, as he knew that she wanted him to invite her to walk that way. He bit his lips. He was waiting there in the hope of Cora joining them; but perhaps she would see them and follow them to the sylvan retreat. He could only hope for it.

"Shall we walk down that way?" he asked, taking the path which led past the house.

He had seen Cora on the porch, and he had hoped that his companion might elect to go that way. But no, with a charming little nod of the head, she said:

"The other path is shortest, and there is an avenue of trees down to the water's edge."

So they strolled off together, and Cora, from the vine-covered porch, watched them with a dull, heavy pain at her heart.

"They have met, and he is infatuated with her, like every one else is," she thought.

Lyle was brilliant in conversation; with her smiles and her glances she did her utmost to captivate the handsome cadet.

She succeeded so well that for a time he quite forgot the little white-robed figure back on the porch.

He thought he had never met a more amiable girl than this lovely dark-eyed creature by his side. She was so

bright, so vivacious, that she amused him—and what young man does not like to be amused?

He admired the girl by his side as men always will admire an exquisitely beautiful face, but his heart had never for an instant swerved from its allegiance to Cora.

He was anxious to get back to the throng on the lawn; it never occurred to him that he had passed over an hour in loitering up and down the river's bank with lovely Lyle; but Cora knew it, and the pain in her heart grew worse.

"She will try to charm him," she muttered, "and she will be sure to succeed."

She saw them approach, and she sprung from her chair. Should she go down and meet them, or should she avoid Arthur? He had been at the lawn *fête* a whole hour, and yet he had not sought her out.

At that moment the band struck up a waltz.

"Oh, how delightful!" breathed Lyle. "I am so fond of dancing!"

"May I hope for a waltz later?" he asked, uttering the words mechanically.

"You may have this one if you like," she answered, looking up archly into his face.

He murmured some inarticulate word, but there was no help for it. She placed her hand on his arm, and the dance began which was to cause so much mischief.

Cora saw, and her heart felt like so much lead in her bosom.

"Why don't you go and join the young folks, my dear?" asked the general. "Lyle will come and sit with me for a little spell if you ask her."

"I am afraid not, papa," answered his daughter, choking down the lump that rose in her throat.

"What is she doing?" he asked, eagerly. "Your eyes are better than mine."

"Dancing," was the brief response.

The general muttered something under his breath, and he grew very restless.

"I wish you would tell her I want her, Cora," he said, sharply.

"Isn't there something that I can do for you, papa?" she asked.

"No," he returned, his face darkening. "With whom is she dancing?"

"Mr. Rollins," replied his daughter, faintly.

He grew so fidgety in his seat that Cora quite subdued her own troubles in trying to interest him.

The waltz was over at last, and Arthur led Lyle to a seat under the drooping branches of the trees. He was thankful enough to see young Captain Harding stepping up to them, and to hear him ask Lyle for a waltz the next moment.

"I shall not dance any more to-day," she said, raising her dark, luminous eyes.

She was in hopes that the captain would bow and turn away, but he had no intention of doing this.

Still he lingered, discussing the *fête*, and what a brilliant success it was. This gave Arthur an opportunity to bow himself out of Lyle's presence, much to her chagrin.

Her eyes followed him to see in which direction he was going, and her anger knew no bounds when she saw him walk straight to where Cora was.

CHAPTER X.

The afternoon was almost over, when Arthur had a few moments to himself and made his way to her side. She nodded quite carelessly to him. There was a flush on her cheeks; but the pretty red lips did not smile their usual welcome for him, and the pretty blue eyes did not brighten at his approach.

"I must have been mistaken," he thought to himself, drawing apart from the group and looking at her with wistful eyes. "She has no particular interest in me, that is certain. I was mad to think that her pleasantness meant anything deeper than the most commonplace kindness."

A deep sigh broke from his lips, and he turned away.

The affair was over at last, much to the regret of every one save Cora.

"If you are coming in our direction, I should be glad to have you walk along with us, Mr. Rollins," said the general.

Both girls looked up suddenly, and both blushed; but Arthur saw only the fair face of Cora.

"I should be only too pleased," he murmured, accepting the general's invitation with alacrity.

He could never tell just how it happened, but as they passed through the arched gate-way, he found himself by the side of Miss Warner, instead of Cora. It never once occurred to him that this came about by the sharpest kind of maneuvering on the part of Lyle, who saw her chance and improved it at once. She chatted to him gayly, and her remarks were so witty that he was obliged to laugh outright.

Their mirth annoyed Cora, who was walking ahead

with her father, although she pretended not to hear, and never once turned her head around.

When Lyle heard that Arthur was coming to the villa to spend a couple of months, her delight knew no bounds.

"How charming!" she cried. "It will certainly be a great relief, it was so monotonous. Cora is not very fond of pleasure."

He looked quite surprised to hear that.

"Dear me! how fast the general and Cora walk!" she said. "In the city we are not noted for being pedestrians, as you are in the country. Would you mind if I asked you to slacken your pace a little?"

Soon Cora found that the distance between herself and Lyle and her companion was growing considerably greater.

"Am I walking too fast for you, papa?" she asked.

He answered:

"No; I could walk even faster."

She said no more.

She and the general were gradually gaining ground, while Arthur and Lyle were left at some little distance.

The general and Cora had entered the house by the time they reached the porch. They could hear all that transpired through the open window of the library.

"Good-bye," she heard Lyle say, as she extended her dimpled jeweled hand. "You will be sure to be with us to-morrow?"

"Yes," he answered, gallantly, raising his hat.

"Come as early in the forenoon as possible," she said, brightly; "I am going out horseback riding. I should be so pleased to have you accompany me."

"Isn't Miss Ormsby going?" he asked.

"Perhaps so," she replied.

"I should be delighted to come." With this he bowed, turned, and walked quickly down the graveled walk. Lyle stood on the porch and watched him until a bend in the road hid him from her.

She might have stood there long hours, unconscious of the flight of time, had not Miss Bitterwood suddenly appeared on the porch.

"Dear me, where have you been? Cora and the general returned fully a quarter of an hour ago. What have you been doing, I wonder?"

"Turning a handsome cadet's head," responded Lyle, promptly.

The housekeeper's brow darkened.

"Wasting your time on some poor cadet," she said, sharply. "Well, well! a peasant will be a peasant, if you deck her in court diamonds."

Cora started and turned pale. How strange it was that the housekeeper should speak so familiarly to Miss Warner; but she would not listen. When the two girls found themselves alone together, Lyle at once began to discuss the lawn *fête*.

"Wasn't it a grand affair?" she said. "I enjoyed it better than I did anything in my life before."

"Perhaps some one helped to make it so very pleasant for you."

Lyle blushed furiously.

"Perhaps," she answered, with a laugh. "Mr. Rollins is an exceedingly pleasant companion," she said. "You did not tell me about him. He is ever so much nicer than any of the other cadets I have met so far. He tells me, too, that he is to be your father's guest during his vacation."

"So I have just heard papa say," returned Cora.

"It always livens up matters so nicely when there is a young gentleman about. What a pity your father did not invite two—one for each of us."

Cora flushed. She could not understand Lyle Warner.

"Why, what are you blushing for?" asked Lyle with a laugh. "Are you also smitten with the handsome cadet?"

"Miss Bitterwood is calling me. I must go," said Cora, anxious to change the subject. But Lyle detected the motive.

On what trifles do human lives turn! If Cora had not blushed, her life would have been entirely different.

"There is something that she is keeping back from me," thought her beautiful, designing companion; "and I must find out what it is."

Aloud she said:

"How long have you known Mr. Rollins, Cora?"

"Some months," was the evasive reply.

"I wonder that you could have known him an hour without falling deeply in love with him, he is so fascinating."

Cora looked embarrassed.

"Perhaps you are one of the kind that never intend leaving your father while he lives?"

"I do not expect to," returned Cora.

"But tell me more about Arthur Rollins," persisted Lyle. "Where you first met him? Has he a sister? Where is his home?"

Before Cora could answer this avalanche of eager questions, Miss Bitterwood entered the drawing-room.

"The general would like to see you, Miss Warner," she said, carelessly.

Lyle's brow darkened, and she bit her lips to keep back

the angry retort that rose to them. There was nothing to do but to obey her aunt's summons. Cora stole quietly up to her own room.

"I have almost a mind to write him not to come," she panted, "she is so much in love with him. He would begin by flirting with her and end by adoring her. But can I stand by and see it, uttering no word? Of course, he is nothing to me; but his eyes have told me that he cares for me, even though his lips did not frame the words."

Then the pride of the Ormsby's came to her.

"I shall not let them see, though my heart breaks!"

Lyle spent the evening in the drawing-room with the general. Cora remained in her room, retiring early under the plea of having a severe headache.

She was not missed. There had been a time, she said to herself, and not very long ago, when her slightest indisposition would have caused the greatest anxiety in the household. It was different now. Of course, her father's attention to the beautiful stranger was only through courtesy, still it hurt Cora most cruelly.

Early the next morning Lyle was in the grounds. She was the first to welcome Arthur when he came to the villa.

"I was expecting you," she said, sweetly. "Welcome to Ormsby Villa, Mr. Rollins."

He looked about for Cora. She was not there.

"She has left the duty of greeting me to her friend," he thought, rather bitterly.

"The general is indulging in an after-breakfast nap over his newspaper, and Cora is busy writing a letter," she explained. "So I promised to take charge of you entirely until luncheon hour."

"It was very good of you," he answered, simply; "but I don't want to be a burden to you."

Lyle laughed merrily.

"Perhaps I look upon it as a pleasure," she said, rather archly.

No man could help feeling flattered to hear such a remark concerning himself from such lovely lips.

A few moments later, to Cora's great astonishment, she saw Lyle and Arthur Rollins riding down the broad graveled carriage road toward the entrance gate, their horses cantering briskly along side by side.

The sight brought the color to her face.

"I did not even know that he had come," she said to herself. "No one took the trouble to inform me. He must have asked for Lyle."

How handsome Lyle looked in her blue riding-habit, the blue veil wound about the silk hat, flying in the breeze, her cheeks all aglow!

"I will show him that I do not care," she said to herself.

But even though she said it so determinedly, she put on her prettiest lawn dress for luncheon, and took extra pains in twining a blue ribbon about her golden curls.

"Where is Lyle?" asked the general of Miss Bitterwood, half an hour later, as she passed through the morning-room. "She is not here to read to me. She has not even cut my papers."

"She has been in her room all the morning with a severe headache. She begged me to make her apologies to you, and to say that she hopes you will not think she has neglected you."

"I did not know that I could miss her so much," sighed the general.

"Shall I go to her and say that you would like her to come down?"

"Oh, by no means," he answered. "Do not disturb her. She will no doubt be down to luncheon presently."

"It's a lucky thing that he doesn't know that she's gone out riding," she thought. "I must go down to the bend in the road and warn her to come home by the side path."

CHAPTER XI.

When Lyle and Arthur Rollins came dashing up the road an hour later, and the girl saw Miss Bitterwood awaiting her at the sharp turn which led to the villa, her brow darkened with a frown. She bit her red lips fiercely to keep back the exclamation that rose to them.

"Ah! there is the housekeeper of the villa; no doubt she wishes to speak with me," she said, carelessly. "If you ride on, I will overtake you in a moment or two. Perhaps it might be more enjoyable for you to ride over by way of the field, and look over the general's stables and kennels."

"Thanks; I will act upon your suggestion," said Arthur, touching the animal lightly with his whip.

In a moment he was quite out of sight. By that time Lyle had reached the spot where Miss Bitterwood was pacing up and down.

"Well," she exclaimed, with a toss of her dark curls, "I suppose I am in for a lecture; but this is hardly the time or the place for it!"

Miss Bitterwood reached for the bridle of the horse, and brought him to a stand-still with a terrible jerk.

"I couldn't have believed this unless I had seen it!" she cried, in a hard, rasping voice. "Are you so blind to your own interests as to flirt openly with this poor cadet who hasn't a cent in his pocket, and right before the general's eyes? You know if you miss him, it means going back to New York and your little garret room, and finding work in some millinery shop at starvation wages."

The girl's face blanched.

"I don't see that I am liable to forget it with you dining it into my ears every hour of the day. Supposing the old general does 'throw me over,' as you call it, it wouldn't matter very much to me if I were lucky enough to capture a young millionaire, would it!"

"First *get* your young millionaire. I hope you don't think Arthur Rollins is one. He's a beggar, I tell you, intent upon capturing an heiress like Cora Ormsby."

The girl smiled superciliously. She did not attach one word of importance to what her aunt said, believing that she spoke with a purpose in view.

"I will not be lectured any longer," cried the girl. "I will have a good time, if I die for it; you may as well understand that first as last."

"Then I wash my hands of you entirely!" cried Miss Bitterwood, furiously.

Lyle shrugged her shapely shoulders.

Without another word, her aunt strode back to the house by a short cut.

It so happened that when Arthur had looked through the stables and passed beyond to the dog-kennels, the first person he met was Cora.

Was it only his fancy, or did the lovely young girl flush crimson as she held out her hand to him?

"Welcome to Ormsby Villa, Mr. Rollins," she said. "I saw you when you were coming to the entrance gate, but before I could get down-stairs you had started out for a ride. I hope you enjoyed it—the morning was delightful."

"Our canter over the hills was charming. It would have been more enjoyable, however, had you been with us."

Cora did not tell him that she had had a hearty cry when she had seen them ride off without her.

"I suppose you want to see the dogs," she said, turning hastily away that he might not see the expression on her face.

They spent some time watching the noble St. Bernard, the general's two magnificent greyhounds, the mastiff, and Prince, the Newfoundland, who was the general favorite.

"Why, what is this?" exclaimed Arthur, moving on to the next kennel. "Not a dog, but a fox, as I live!"

"Yes, it is a fox," said Cora; "but he is a general favorite, perhaps the best-loved animal about the place, and quite tame, I assure you. You see he knows me and loves me well."

"As if any one could know you and refrain from loving you," thought Arthur, looking at the sweet, dainty girl by his side, and the lovely pink and white dimpled face, which the broad sun-hat, with its simple wreath of blue corn-flowers, half revealed.

But, instead of uttering the words that sprung to his lips, he crushed them back, saying:

"It is an odd animal to make so much of. It must owe its place in the kennels to an accident. Did it come

to steal your chickens and get caught in a trap?" laughed 'Arthur.

"No. I will tell you how it came about. The story is quite interesting, as well as pathetic. Although papa is not as young as he used to be, he is very fond of young people about him. Two years ago he invited a party of young gentlemen up from the city to enjoy a fox-hunt. He secured three fine specimens, but in bringing them here two escaped, and the remaining one had one of his legs severely injured.

"He was put in a kennel and cared for, to be in prime order when the day of the hunt should arrive. One of the gentlemen came out every morning to look after him, until, in the course of time, the animal grew to know him.

"At last the day of the hunt dawned bright and clear. At an early hour the gentlemen were mounted on their horses, and chatting gayly to each other in the best of spirits. The hounds were running to and fro, and bay-ing with impatience. They seemed to know what was coming, and were anxious for the fray.

"I went upstairs and shut myself in my room. I could not bear to see the fox let loose and the mad chase begin. It seemed like cruelty rather than sport.

"Colonel Hart—that was the gentleman who took such an interest in the affair, and who had so keenly watched the rapid recovery of the animal—at length announced that all was ready. I heard the bugle-call and knew that they were off.

"I will tell you the rest of the narrative in Colonel Hart's own words:

"The moment the bugle sounded, the fox was off like an arrow from a bow; but ere he had leaped the first

fence we were after him in close pursuit, scarcely a dozen rods behind. Over fences, ditches, and hedges we went at a mad gallop, the horses snorting with excitement, the hounds mad in pursuit of their game.

“Surely—ay, surely and steadily—they are gaining on the fox, the colonel a yard in advance,” added Cora, clasping her hands together in the excitement of telling the story. “Another leap, and yet another, and the fox would be overtaken by the hounds.

“The poor animal seemed to realize its peril. One instant, on the edge of a rising hill, it paused and cast one terrified glance backward. It saw the dogs, their mad eyes glaring, eager for its life-blood; it saw the hunters, with their set faces; but it also saw the familiar face of Colonel Hart. In an instant the poor animal recognized him as the friend who had come to the kennel every day to see him.

“Before any one had the slightest intimation of what the fox was about to do, it had turned, and with one leap sprung over the heads of the excited dogs, and landed directly in Colonel Hart’s arms. Quivering with fear, the agonized eyes that sought his seemed to say in almost mortal language:

“‘Save my life! They want to kill me! I trust my life to you, for you are my friend.’

“Colonel Hart stopped short.

“‘Gentlemen,’ he said, ‘the hunt is over. I would rather sacrifice my right arm than hunt to death the animal that has put its life in my hands, that trusts me. I shall keep this fox as a family pet as long as he lives.’”

CHAPTER XII.

"This poor animal has had a strange history," said Arthur Rollins; "he ought to be thankful that he has fallen into such good hands. You have a very kind heart to feel such sympathy for him."

"The poor fellow appreciates any kindness shown him," said the girl, turning away.

They sauntered slowly back to the house, chatting as they went. Lyle stood at the open window of the morning-room awaiting their approach. There was a dangerous light in her eyes, and the smile on her lips was not pleasant to see.

She had changed her riding-habit for a pretty pink chambray, and looked as cool and fresh and fair as a rose, with her floating pink ribbons, that matched the deepening rose-tints in cheek and lips.

"You must be quite tired, Mr. Rollins," she said, archly. "I should have thought you would have preferred resting a little while on the cool veranda; but then, putting all thoughts of self away to please others is a virtue with you."

"I did not know you were so tired," said Cora, apologetically.

"I did feel a little tired when I came in, but I grew so interested in looking over the kennels that I quite forgot it."

"A soldier ought never to admit that he is tired," remarked the general's daughter.

At luncheon Lyle was gayety itself. A man would have had a heart of stone not to have been charmed with her.

When they rose from the table, Cora asked Arthur and

Lyle to join her in the music-room, to look over some new songs which she had just received.

"Have you any favorites, Mr. Rollins!" she asked.

He shook his dark, handsome head.

"All songs are pleasing to me," he said, "if they are simple and sweet."

Lyle had nothing to say.

"She wants to show him that she is up in music and that I am not," she thought; "but in this she will find herself mistaken."

Cora sat down to the instrument first, and played the most difficult selections with an ease and grace which showed her an apt pupil of the grand old masters. Arthur could not have told what it was, but he knew that it was the melody of which the poets sung, which made the world brighter, and his heart beat quicker for having heard it.

The little hands grew tired at length, though Arthur could have listened on and on forever.

"*You* play, do you not, Lyle?" she asked, suddenly.

"A little," was the answer; "not by note. The songs I love best I know by heart. I love best to play in the twilight."

At that moment a summons came for Cora; the general wanted her.

Lyle was secretly delighted. She could not have been called at a more propitious time, she told herself, for it left her alone with Arthur.

"Draw your chair nearer to the piano," she said.

He did as she requested. He never forgot that hour. The sunshine drifting in from the open windows, the rich odor of hyacinths and wild roses that ran riot over the lattice-work outside, the beautiful girl seated at the

piano, and the voice that filled the spacious room with such melody as he had never heard before.

The hours flew by on golden wings, and, true to her promise, Lyle improved them as the honey-bee the golden light that falls on the blooming roses.

Arthur told himself that no man was ever so fortunate as to have two such lovely companions; but he could not find time to exchange a single word with Cora.

Lyle always filled up the breach by her ready wit and the happy faculty of knowing just what to say and when to say it.

"I prayed that the night might be lovely," she said, as they strolled out into the grounds, while the dusk crept up and the darkness of night grew on. "See, there is the moon rising over the tops of that belt of pine-trees yonder; and while we have been standing here the stars have come out. See, the heavens are studded with them."

"It will be a glorious night on the water," said Cora, to which Arthur fully agreed.

The grounds of the villa ran directly to the bank of the Hudson. They found the little white skiff rocking to and fro as though chafing at restraint and anxious to be dancing away over the billows.

Again, as though by chance, Arthur found himself seated with the oars facing Lyle. A few deft strokes sent the little boat flying out over the water.

"I thought I was an adept at handling a boat," laughed Cora; "but I really could take lessons from you with great advantage, Mr. Rollins."

"My home was on the bank of the river. I spent a great deal of my time in my boat," replied Arthur.

"I suppose you are an expert swimmer?" remarked Cora.

"I have been accounted a very fair one," he replied, modestly.

"If this boat should tip over, which one of us would you try to save?" asked Lyle in a bantering tone.

"The question is hardly a fair one," declared Arthur. "I should do my best to save both."

"Do not get too far in mid-stream," warned Cora. "The Albany boat will soon come steaming up, and unless we get back nearer shore we will be right in her way."

"It looks as if there was a storm coming up, too," said Arthur, resting on his oars for a moment and scanning the heavens.

All at once the stars seemed to die out of the sky, and great black clouds swept over the moon.

"There is a storm coming," said Arthur. "See how the wind is freshening, and there is a dense fog creeping up. I am afraid it will be down upon us before we can reach shore."

It took but a moment of time to turn the little boat; but in that moment a dense fog seemed to rise suddenly from the water and infold them, growing so dense that he could not see even Lyle's face, scarcely three feet from him. Arthur's face grew white with anxiety.

"What is *that*?" he cried, as a muffled sound reached his ear.

"The fog-horn," said Lyle.

"Ah! great Heaven!" cried Cora, starting to her feet, "it is the Albany boat bearing down upon us! It sounds nearer each instant. We are surely lost!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"Great Heaven! it is the Albany boat bearing down upon us, and they can not see us through the fog. We are lost—lost!"

Cora's startled cry echoed out wildly over the vast expanse of water.

In her wild excitement she had sprung to her feet. That action was fatal. In a twinkling she found herself struggling in the water.

Quick as a flash, Arthur sprung to her rescue, and Lyle, screaming wildly, clutched the side of the boat, saving herself, by the barest luck, from overturning the skiff and throwing herself into the water.

She realized the danger as her terrified ear caught the sound of the fog-horn of the approaching steamer.

In that moment the sense of self-preservation, so strong within all of us, took possession of her. Leaning quickly forward, she grasped the oars just as they were sliding from their locks. One or two strokes of the oars, and the little boat whirled out over the waves. Not an instant too soon, for a moment later the steamboat passed swiftly over the spot where the little skiff had been.

Some one on deck saw the miraculous escape. A great cry arose, for they beheld in the same moment two dark forms struggling in the water. Arthur had caught the slender form in his herculean grasp just as the girl was sinking for the third and last time.

He saw the steamer, and he struck out for it. In an instant there was the greatest confusion on deck. Ropes were thrown out to him, while some one went quickly to the assistance of the terrified girl in the boat. In less time than it takes to tell it, all three were in the cabin

of the steamer—Cora in a dead faint, Arthur weak from exhaustion, while Lyle, save for the scare, was unhurt.

“That was indeed a narrow escape,” said the captain, as he led Arthur off to one of the state-rooms.

Meanwhile, the restoratives which had been applied had taken their effect upon Cora. Slowly her eyes opened. Was it a dream? She was in some strange place, the face of Lyle bending over her.

“What has happened?” she whispered. “Where am I? Oh, I remember! The skiff—the Albany boat!”

Arthur came into the cabin to meet them, holding out hands anxiously to Cora. To see her standing there alive and well before him was so great a joy that it fairly took his breath away.

He could not find words in which to tell her how thankful he was, and he thought of the mad vow that he had taken when he sprung from the skiff into the wild waters—if he could not save her he would die with her.

And when they came up the garden-walk that led to the porch of Ormsby Villa, the general, who sat smoking in his high willow rocker, never dreamed of the thrilling experience through which they had passed.

“Did you enjoy your row on the river?” he asked, detaining Lyle after the others had passed into the house.

“Not so very much,” she said, toying nervously with the long ribbons of her hat; “the pleasure would have been greater had you been with us.”

“Thank you for that pretty little speech,” he returned, gallantly, raising the little white hand to his lips. “I assure you that the pleasure would have been mine had I been able to accompany you—this gout is very provoking.”

Lyle turned her head away, that he could not see the sneer on her red lips.

"I grew worried about you when the fog came up so suddenly," he said; "but I felt that Cora was in good hands when she was in your charge."

Lyle's dark eyes flashed. "I suppose he thinks me a chaperon instead of a companion for his daughter," she thought, furiously; but she turned to the general with a very gracious smile on her lips:

"Will you excuse me if I retire to the house?" she asked. "I feel a little tired."

"Certainly," he responded, gallantly; "go to your own room by all means; don't let me detain you."

He looked after the slim, girlish figure with a weary expression in his fine old eyes.

"Am I mad that I should hope such a beautiful creature should love me?" he muttered. "Sometimes I think that it is impossible; she would be more apt to care for that foolish young fellow Rollins; but still, Miss Bitterwood can not be mistaken. Only to-day she said to me jokingly—yet I think she meant it—'General, I think you are renewing your youth. Unless I am very much mistaken, our pretty young guest is falling in love with you.' If it wasn't for this gout, I could get about as lively as a boy."

He rose from his chair and attempted to skip across the porch, but old age and the gout were too much for him.

At the first nimble step, he sunk down in his tracks with a cry of pain that brought the servants to his aid in a hurry.

The upshot of the matter was that he was carried helplessly up to his room, and put to bed groaning with pain.

It would be a fortnight ere he could appear downstairs again.

Lyle made the most of this, and flirted desperately with Arthur Rollins. She had him most of the time to herself, Cora was so engrossed in the care of her father.

The fortnight during which Cora immured herself in her father's room passed drearily enough to Arthur, despite Lyle's attractions. When three days passed and she had not put in an appearance, he grew desperate.

"She does not care to see me," he argued to himself.

Then a brilliant plan occurred to him. He would settle the doubt in his heart at once.

Going to his own room, and after writing and tearing up page after page, he succeeded in producing the following note:

"DEAR CORA—The three days in which you have absented yourself so completely have been days of endless torment to me. If you do not appear by to-morrow, I shall feel like ending my visit at Ormsby Villa at once. You can easily understand the reason why. It is this: I love you, Cora. A day that I do not see you has no sunshine in it for me. It brings forcibly to me the terrible thought—what if the time should ever come when I could see you no more? The very thought brings with it a fever of pain so great that it seems to scorch through to my very heart. Let me confess to you on this white paper the secret which I have never dared to tell you when I was in your presence. Without you life would be unbearable to me. When I have attained some prominence in military life, will you become my wife? Perhaps I do not couch the words in as flowery language as some men could, but it comes from the depths of my heart, and makes the honest words a prayer to you. I send with this little note two roses—a yellow rose and a white one. If your answer be 'Yes,' wear the white

rose on your bosom. If it be 'No,' I will know it by seeing the yellow one there. I can say no more; words and expressions fail us when the heart is too full. How eagerly I shall watch for your decision you will never fully realize. My life, my future, lie in the issue.

"Yours faithfully in life or in death,

"ARTHUR."

Hastily sealing the note, he rang for one of the servants to dispatch it to Cora.

CHAPTER XIV.

It so happened that when the maid entered Cora's room with Arthur Rollins' note and the two roses, there was no one there but Lyle. She dropped the novel she was reading and looked up quickly, recognizing the writing at a glance as Arthur's.

"Are they for me?" she asked, eagerly, holding out her hands for them, the color coming and going on her face.

She remembered that she had told him only that morning how fond she was of both white and yellow roses.

"No, they are not for you, miss," answered the maid; "they are for Miss Cora."

Lyle's face grew dark and stormy with rage. When the girl had quitted the apartment she crossed the room quickly, seized the flowers, and was about to fling them upon the floor and stamp upon them, but she controlled herself by a great effort.

"That would never do," she muttered; then her eyes

fell upon the letter which accompanied them. "What has he written to her, I wonder."

The temptation to know its contents was too great for Lyle to withstand. Picking up a sharp pen-knife which lay upon the table, she ran the thin steel blade so deftly around the lightly mucilaged edge that it yielded at once to the knife. It was but the work of a moment to draw the written pages from the envelope and devour their contents.

"A confession of love!" she shrieked below her breath. "He asks her to be his wife!"

Once, twice, thrice she read the letter through, her face changing from one of beauty to that of a fiend incarnate.

"So!" she cried, "all my labor, all the smiles I have lavished upon him, have gone for naught. I can not win his love from her; but one thing I vow—if I can not win him, *she* shall never be his wife!"

But what should she do with the letter? Cora might return at any moment and see it in her hand.

She would not have her receive that letter and read its contents for all that this world held.

At that instant she heard Cora's light footstep in the corridor without. Quick as a flash, she thrust it into her bosom, but not an instant too soon, for just then the door opened and Cora entered, carrying a light wicker-basket in her hand.

"Ah! you are here, Lyle!" she exclaimed; "I have been looking the grounds over for you. No one would think of finding you indoors on a day like this. It is a perfect June day."

Lyle laughed constrainedly.

A little later the bell rang for luncheon. The two girls descended the stairs to the dining-room.

A few moments later the door opened and Arthur entered. He saw that Cora and Lyle were already seated at the table.

Lyle made some kind of a light, laughing remark as he seated himself at the table, but he could not, to have saved his life, have told what it was that she said.

The perfume from the rose that Cora wore on her bosom reached him. Did it mean happiness or despair?

Although Arthur seemed so brilliantly gay, yet Lyle noticed that he did not eat a mouthful, that food seemed to choke him. When the meal was over, Cora rose from the table, her guests following.

"Do come out into the grounds, Mr. Rollins," said Lyle; "I have something to show you."

He would have given the world for the sweet privilege of being by himself in that hour, but he could not possibly refuse. There was no way out of it but to accompany her.

Would Cora go with them? A mad hope that perhaps she might filled his heart; but that hope died away in his bosom when he saw the general's daughter turn away in the direction of the corridor and ascend the stairs.

"Isn't it a perfect morning?" exclaimed Lyle. "The birds are singing and the air is heavy with the perfume of flowers."

He did not answer. The very mention of flowers made his soul sick within him. Lyle saw the sudden pallor that crossed his face, and her brow darkened.

"Mr. Rollins," she said, laying a little mite of a hand on his white arm, "something has gone wrong with you. I know it, I feel sure of it. Won't you tell me what it is? Perhaps I could help you. You arouse all my sympathies."

"What a strange idea; you are inclined to be notional," he said.

"It is not a strange idea, it is the truth," replied the girl, quietly.

A sudden thought came to him. This girl was so sweet, and so gracious, that perhaps she could aid him in his great difficulty. An impulse which he could not wholly account for urged him to confess his secret to his companion; little dreaming of the sorrow that was to accrue from it.

"I will take you at your word, Miss Warner," he said. "I really think you can aid me if you will, you have such good judgment and tact. What would you do, Miss Warner, if you loved some one very dearly and she did not care for you?"

Lyle started. The hand on his arm trembled like an aspen leaf, but he was too preoccupied with his own thoughts to notice it.

"If you loved some one better than life itself, and were treated kindly, but nothing more, what would you do," he asked, huskily, "to gain the favor of the one whose love meant your vital happiness? There is such a one whom I adore, but she does not care for me. I would give my life and soul to win her. She is to me what the gladsome sunlight is to the dark and dreary earth."

"Do you know what I would do?" said Lyle in a low, intense voice. "Listen: I would find somebody else to make love to if I were you, and when this girl whom you adore imagined that you really cared for another, woman-like she would be more apt to want you then. If you can only once arouse jealousy in her heart, you can win her love. It is well worth trying."

Arthur looked wonderingly at his companion. Surely such a way to win a girl's love seemed strange to him.

"I am a woman, and I know," said Lyle. "The trial will convince you that I have advised you rightly."

CHAPTER XV.

The answer which Lyle had given Arthur Rollins fairly took his breath away. She repeated it so that she would be sure to understand her.

"If the young girl is coy and will not be wooed, and yet beneath that cold exterior you think there beats a warm heart that might be touched with love, you must try to win her by strategy. Make desperate love to some other girl when she is around; that will arouse her jealousy, and where there is jealousy there is always love."

Arthur drew his breath hard.

"It seems a cruel way to win one's affection," he said; "but perhaps you are right. You know the way of winning a girl's heart. I may as well tell you all. The fair young girl whom I so hopelessly adore is your friend, Cora Ormsby."

That very evening, much to Arthur's surprise, he received word that his leave of absence had ended, and that he was expected to report for duty at once.

"I must have a little talk with Cora before I go," he said. "You must arrange it somehow for me, Miss Warner."

"With much pleasure," she said. "I will send her out

to you on the balcony, where in the moonlight you can talk to her to your heart's content."

"You are good to me," he said, his eyes filling with tears. "I shall never forget your kindness to me, Miss Warner."

"Do not mention it," she said, waving her hand to him, as she disappeared through the long, open French window of the parlor.

After what seemed an age to him, he heard the sound of footsteps.

The footsteps drew nearer.

Arthur paced up and down the moonlit balcony, wondering what words he should use to tell her of the great, overpowering love for her which filled his soul.

The lace draperies were flung back, and Lyle, not Cora, stood before him.

"My dear Mr. Rollins," she said, "one never likes to be the bearer of an unkind message; but I beg of you not to blame me for it. I went to Cora's room, and there I found her busy with a little piece of fancy-work which she is making for Captain Lindsay. When she heard my errand, her anger was certainly very great.

"Go to him and tell him that I will not see him," she said. "You must say 'Good-bye' to him for me."

"All expostulation was useless. She had made up her mind, and would not change it. The more I said, the colder and haughtier she grew. I was obliged to leave her at last, with that answer for you. I am, oh, so sorry! I beg you not to hold me responsible for the words."

Arthur was proud. He had been deeply wounded by the girl he loved.

There was great consternation in the household next morning when the general received the note Arthur had

left, which was the first intimation he had had of his intended departure.

"However, army rules are not to be trifled with," he said to Cora when she brought him the letter.

He had gone without so much as saying good-bye to her. What could it mean? What could she have done to so offend him?

"I will write and ask him," said Cora to herself.

Suiting the action to the word, she went straight to her desk to write the fatal letter that was to wreck two lives.

CHAPTER XVI.

When Cora sat down to her desk to write the letter, but one thought occurred to her, and that was—to let Arthur know how deeply grieved she was about his going away without exchanging one word of farewell in person.

"I should like to see you just once more, and to find out if I have done anything to offend you. If you will come to the orchard at ten P. M. to-morrow we can talk the matter over. Yours very sincerely,

"CORA."

In her excitement, and in writing the note so hurriedly, she did not see the terrible mistake she had made in putting down "P. M.," which meant at night, instead of writing "A. M.," in the morning. In writing the note it never occurred to the girl that she was doing anything out of the way.

She had no mother to advise her, and a young girl

never thinks of taking her love affairs to a cross, sick, gouty old father.

Without stopping to read over what she had written, Cora quickly dispatched the note. It so happened that while it was on its way to its destination, Arthur, who had forgotten a couple of books which he had left in his room, was hurrying toward the villa. There was the hope, too, in his heart that he might see Cora.

So intent was he with his own thoughts that he did not see the dark form of Captain Lindsay keeping pace with him scarcely a rod behind. The handsome young cadet had gained permission for an hour's leave of absence, and returned to the villa.

This looked remarkably suspicious to the captain.

He meant to see the outcome of it. By the merest chance, Arthur took the path that led to the rear of the grounds.

As he reached the oak-tree which Lyle had mentioned as having a deep hollow in it, wherein she was to put her letters for him, he started, and the desire came over him to examine it. Surely it could do no harm. Running his hand into the trunk of the tree, suddenly it came in contact with a bit of paper. Drawing it out, he found it to be an envelope addressed to himself. He saw at a glance that it was Lyle's writing. Why, what could she have to write to him about in so short a time, he wondered. The envelope contained but a short note. He quickly ran his eyes over its contents, which were as follows:

“DEAR MR. ROLLINS—Do not come near the house nor write, for reasons which I will explain later on.”

He stood quite still for a moment and stared at the note.

How lucky a thing it was that he received it just in time! he told himself. How thoughtful of Lyle to write him! But what could it mean, he wondered. He turned slowly and walked back to camp.

Captain Lindsay, who followed him, had watched what had taken place with breathless interest.

Could it be that the handsome, dashing young cadet and the general's daughter were keeping up a clandestine correspondence?

He must know what that letter contained, he told himself.

He knew by past experience, on the night of the ball, that Arthur Rollins was his equal in point of strength.

He could not take it from him in a hand-to-hand encounter.

"Ah! I have it!" he exclaimed. "He will read it over while on duty, and then it can be taken from him."

Captain Lindsay took a shorter cut back to camp, and reached it before Arthur did. Thus it happened that he did not see Arthur take Lyle's letter, tear it slowly into minute shreds, and fling it slowly to the breeze.

To Arthur's surprise, he found Cora's missive awaiting him. What could it mean? Cora had asked him to come, while Lyle's note particularly urged him most earnestly to remain away until she could communicate with him.

Now, which should he do? The matter troubled him greatly.

He noticed the error that Cora had made in her note regarding the time, and he remarked to himself what an unpleasant consequence might accrue if it had fallen

into any one's else hands and they had been inclined to make mischief out of it.

He only had time to glance quickly over Cora's note ere he was called to duty, and he thrust it hastily into his breast-pocket, to read again at the first moment he could do so without being observed.

He was on the end of the line at drill. The cadets were all resting on their arms for a moment, when the impulse suddenly came to him to glance at the heading of the note to see whether Cora had said, "My dear Friend, Mr. Rollins," or if she had begun it with a formal "Mr. Rollins, Dear Sir," when he felt a tap on his shoulder, accompanied by a deep bass voice saying:

"Take that letter to the officer of the day!"

For a moment Arthur seemed fairly paralyzed.

Turning quickly, he found himself confronted by Captain Lindsay, whose face was distorted with rage.

"What is that which you have in your hand?" he demanded—"a letter?"

"Yes," answered Arthur.

"Hand it to me!" commanded his superior officer.

"I can not," said Arthur in a low voice vibrating with emotion.

"You dare refuse?" cried Captain Lindsay, his face fairly livid with passion.

"In this instance, I must!" cried Arthur Rollins, firmly. "No eye shall ever read this letter save my own!"

"For the last time, I say, give me that letter, or I shall have it taken from you by force!"

"Never!" retorted Arthur. "I would sooner give up my life!"

"Put Mr. Rollins under arrest, and take from him

the letter which he has in his possession!" commanded Captain Lindsay, summoning a sergeant who was passing.

Quick as a flash, Arthur Rollins tore the note into a thousand shreds, and before any one had the slightest idea of what he was about to do, crushed the bits into a hard, compact ball and swallowed it, thus putting it past the power of Captain Lindsay to ever find out the contents of the note which Cora Ormsby had written him.

The action was so sudden that for an instant it almost staggered Captain Lindsay. He saw that he was baffled—ignominiously baffled in the trap he had set to catch the handsome cadet.

In less time than it takes to tell it, Arthur Rollins found himself under arrest, charged with resisting his superior officer and destroying a letter.

General Warburton, the commander in charge, asked, sternly:

"What have you to say, Mr. Rollins?"

"What can I say, sir?" returned the young cadet, earnestly.

"What did you do with the letter in question?"

"Destroyed it," came the answer, calm and clear.

"Whom was it from?" asked General Warburton.

"I am sorry to say that I must decline to tell, sir, as it was purely of a personal and private nature."

"You absolutely refuse to reveal its contents?"

Arthur Rollins turned as white as marble, but he looked with unflinching eyes at his superior officer, as he replied:

"I *must* refuse, sir."

Very calmly he received the order to go at once to his tent.

Left alone by himself, Arthur Rollins bowed his head in his hands. He had saved the fair name of pretty Cora, that angel among girls. He did not care what they did with him for it; he would willingly have laid down his life for her.

A week passed, and Arthur, in close confinement, wondered what the outcome of all his trouble would be. The little guard-house in which he paced up and down seemed like a veritable prison cell to him.

He was used to vigorous out-of-door life, and being penned up in the narrow guard-house was beginning to tell upon him.

He little dreamed that during that time Captain Lindsay was doing his utmost to make things look pretty black for the handsome young fellow who had supplanted him in Cora Ormsby's favor, whom he hated with all the desperate hatred of his revengeful nature.

During that never-to-be-forgotten week Arthur saw but few of his old comrades. He never dreamed that a terrible story was being circulated among his companions—that he would bear watching.

He had heard the rumor that several of the cadets had complained that they had lost their valuable time-pieces. The matter had been kept exceedingly quiet, in the hope of tracing them, but so far it had proved unavailing. At about this time a strange event happened which seemed to play directly into Captain Lindsay's hands.

On the morning of the day of Arthur's arrest a most malicious specimen of the tramp *genus* was found loitering about the grounds. He was taken into custody. A note was found in his pocket which read as follows:

"I can not see you just now. Wait until the affair has blown over, and then I will arrange for a meeting."

There was great excitement at head-quarters when it was discovered that this man, who had in his pocket a note from Arthur Rollins, was a noted New York crook.

While they were making investigations, the man was suddenly seized with apoplexy, and expired. The general believed that the letter which young Rollins had received was from this man—that its contents were of so dangerous a nature that he was obliged to resort to most desperate methods lest it should be discovered.

General Warburton had always held to one strict rule: "Believe every man a rascal until he is found to be otherwise."

For the first time in his life he had allowed himself to be influenced by impressions. He had been strangely drawn to the young cadet at first sight when he had assisted at his examination. He was sorry to see his downfall; but he hid his sympathy under a very stern exterior. He determined to try an experiment. He waited until the midnight hour—at the time when only the sentries and the men on duty were about—then he sent for young Rollins.

The room looked strangely weird as Arthur entered it in charge of the guard, which was dismissed at the door.

"You will step this way, Mr. Rollins," said General Warburton, in his most severe manner.

The young man obeyed. He saw a dark form on a stretcher, over which the general stood, motionless as a statue. He approached wonderingly.

"Can you tell me who this fellow is?" said the gen-

eral, reaching up and turning a flood of light upon the scene.

One glance, and Arthur Rollins staggered back as though a sword had pierced his heart.

"You know him, then?"

Like one hearing the sentence of death, the young man bowed his head in assent—ay, bowed his head until it rested on his breast, as though he never cared to lift it in this world again.

"Who is he? I demand the truth!"

"You shall have it, sir," answered Arthur Rollins, huskily.

It was nearly daylight when the young cadet left General Warburton's presence. He was whiter than he would ever be in death.

Would General Warburton expose him?

"If he does, I shall kill myself!" he muttered.

CHAPTER XVII.

Long after Arthur Rollins had left him, General Warburton sat silent and motionless. The tramp had been quietly and deftly removed, and there was none to ask whither he had been taken.

When the sunlight poured into the room, General Warburton still sat perfectly motionless with his head bent on his hands.

The strange story which the young man had divulged to him had almost taken his breath away. He had made, too, a wonderful discovery which greatly surprised him.

The next day, very much to the chagrin of Captain

Lindsay, Arthur Rollins was honorably acquitted; he dared not question his superior officer, or make any fuss over the outcome of the matter.

He swore to himself that ere another fortnight he should find something else against Arthur Rollins which it would not be so easy for him to explain. Just at this critical time a report was received that a large detachment was to be sent out to the frontier to suppress hostilities there. Several young officers were detailed from West Point.

General Ormsby was in command; Captains Hastings and Lindsay were to be of his staff, and among the other names that were enrolled was that of Arthur Rollins.

Captain Lindsay fairly ground his teeth with impotent rage. There was no way in which he could get Arthur Rollins' name struck off, he well knew. His anger was all the more intense when he learned that there was a likelihood of General Ormsby taking his daughter Cora to the frontier with him, and perhaps the general's ward, Lyle Warner, would accompany them.

For this reason, if for no other, there was not a man at the Point but would have given anything in the world to have gone on that expedition.

Regiments were constantly being sent to the far West, and the departure of the boys in blue under command of General Ormsby attracted the usual attention.

At last, with many a "God-speed," they were fairly on their way. It was a journey never to be forgotten. The ladies who accompanied the regiment declared it was simply charming. Staging over the mountains, following the narrow road, where one misstep of the mountain mules would mean certain death in the chasm thousands

of feet below, lent a spice of excitement to those who traveled over the ground for the first time.

At last, one morning, when the sun was just rising over the belt of cottonwood in the east, the alkaline wastes of Wyoming Valley spread out before them, with the thread-like stream of the Beaver River winding along like a serpent of silver as far as the eye could reach, with Fort Hadley to the right of it, in the blue, hazy distance, they reached their destination.

The white covered wagons, this strange mode of traveling, delighted Lyle. Stopping wherever noon or night overtook them to cook or to sleep, was a wild, romantic life that she had never dreamed of.

From the very first moment of their starting, Arthur Rollins had tried to secure a few moments' conversation with Cora, to explain to her why he had not kept the appointment which he had made; but every effort was balked by the sudden appearance upon the scene of either Lyle Warner or Captain Lindsay, to say nothing of Captain Hastings, who hung about Cora like a veritable shadow.

That Captain Lindsay heartily detested Arthur Rollins was known to more than one of the boys of the regiment; and they could readily understand why, too, when they saw that Cora Ormsby, the general's pretty daughter, blushed confusedly and turned away whenever her eyes and Arthur's met.

The occasion of the re-enforcement of General Ormsby's regiment caused great commotion at Fort Hadley, especially as there were young ladies among the arrivals, and the prettiest girls imaginable.

These maids and matrons looked with glaring eyes of fury at the young and pretty girls whom General

Ormsby had brought with him, registering a vow that they would make it as unpleasant for them as they could, and they would be glad to leave Fort Hadley and return to their own domain in the East.

There was much discussion over the new arrivals that night on the piazza of Mrs. Raymond, the young wife of the major, who had brought her sister, Julia Gordon, out with her to get the best catch of the fort. It was true that Miss Gordon was not quite as young as she once was. Her married sister always impressed upon every one that Julia was a mere child—only eighteen; but there was not a man in camp who did not have the secret suspicion that the mere child was nearer eight-and-twenty than eighteen.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Major Raymond entered the house hurriedly.

"You are wanted at head-quarters," he said, hurriedly. "All the ladies are gathering there. They are talking about giving a ball to-morrow night in honor of the newcomers."

"Why, we had a hop only last week," declared Mrs. Raymond, with a toss of her head.

"Now, don't go over there and say anything to oppose it," said her husband, seeing that she was decidedly against the idea. "You know they gave one for you when you and your sister came."

Mrs. Raymond shrugged her shapely shoulders.

"I suppose they will have the ball whether I assent or not," she said.

Throwing a light scarf over her head, and motioning her sister to follow, Mrs. Raymond whisked out of the room.

She found all the ladies of the garrison gathered together in great excitement over the projected festivity. Neither Cora, Lyle, nor Miss Bitterwood was present. They had sought a little rest in their cottage at Officers' Row, and had retired at once to sleep off the fatigue of their journey. Messengers were sent out at once to all the adjoining forts, that all the officers and their ladies might be present at the great event of the season, to welcome the lovely Eastern girls and the crack regiment from West Point.

"I am sorry that they went to all this trouble," declared General Ormsby, "for I shall not be able to attend, I fear. My rheumatism and gout are getting the best of me."

"But Cora and Lyle looked forward to it with all the eagerness that young girls experience in such affairs.

The officers at Fort Hadley had kept the secret of the great ball very closely, that it might not be known among the Indian villages some twenty miles distant. But for all their caution, the intelligence had reached them, and a secret conference was held at the great Indian wigwam. What would it portend? Who could say?

The great chief, Blackhawk, shrugged his huge shoulders ominously, as he said:

"Let the white men dance to-night; the Indians shall dance there when the sun rises. Wait and see!"

CHAPTER XIX.

Every one was on the *qui vive* of expectation about the grand ball which was to take place that evening.

The ladies of the garrison could think of, talk of nothing else.

All the pretty white dresses and fleecy mulls and gay ribbons in their possession were gone over carefully, for every woman, as well as every young girl, wanted to look their best on this gala occasion.

Captain Lindsay presented himself early at General Ormsby's for Cora.

"Girl-like, she is not ready," said the general. "It's strange how much time they take to fuss over their curls and furbelows. A man can get ready for the most important occasion in ten minutes. It seems almost incredible to me that women should want to take as many hours. Ah! here she comes now, the little witch!"

At that moment Cora entered the room, radiant as a dream in her fleecy dress of spotless white, with a spray of wild flowers at her belt and intertwined in her golden curls.

If Captain Lindsay admired her before, he fell head over heels in love with her now, as he gazed with admiration at the airy, fairy creature who advanced to meet him.

His heart thrilled through and through as the tips of the little pink fingers rested in his palm for one brief second. Before he had time to clasp them closer, they were hurriedly drawn away from him.

The girl said, coldly:

"I am ready, Captain Lindsay. Good-bye, papa;" and she threw her arms around the old general's neck

and laid her fresh, warm cheek against his. "You will not be lonely, will you, dear?"

"No," he answered. "Go and dance and have a good time, and break the hearts of all the fellows of the garrison, and your old father will sit on the porch and listen to the music as it floats back to him. If I don't fall asleep, I may take a look in before the affair breaks up."

"Do, papa!" exclaimed Cora. "I shall look for you."

"Don't spoil a good time by having *me* on your mind," called the general.

"Isn't it a glorious night?" said Captain Lindsay, as he paused on the porch for an instant. "Not a cloud in the sky, the moon at its full, and the stars so large and bright that they seem like glittering diamonds twinkling in the azure blue. Shall we take a stroll about? It is early yet, and the night is excessively warm."

"No, Captain Lindsay," said Cora, "I prefer not. As I am to be one of the guests of honor, it would look better to be there early instead of late."

He bit his lip.

"It is such a pity to go in-doors a night like this," he said.

"If you would enjoy a stroll so much, Captain Lindsay, you can come out again after you leave me at the ball, and you can stroll about to your heart's content."

He eagerly caught the little hand that lay lightly on his arm.

"Do you not know that it is the company one has with one that makes moonlight strolls either a heaven on earth or unbearably tedious? If you were in the ball-room, all my interest would be centered there."

"Captain Lindsay," exclaimed Cora, "I do not like to have you talk to me so! It is not pleasant."

"It would be pleasant for almost any other girl acquaintance of mine to hear those words from my lips," he retorted, bitterly.

"Possibly," said Cora; "but it does not follow that I should be interested in them."

"You would have cared for me if it had not been for that miserable fellow Rollins!" he declared, haughtily.

The girl angrily drew her hand from his arm.

"A person who speaks ill of Mr. Rollins in my presence—the man who saved my life—can not hope to retain my esteem."

"We must not quarrel over this matter," said the Captain. "I wish you would promise me one thing," he went on suddenly, "if you never grant me another favor in your life."

"What is that?" asked Cora, wonderingly.

"That is, promise you will not dance with Arthur Rollins at the ball to-night."

He saw the girl's cheeks flush as crimson as the wild roses she wore at her belt, and the flush creep to the roots of her golden hair. How was he to know that it had been her one hope, day and night, ever since she had first heard of the ball, that she would see Arthur there, and dance with him?

"I shall not promise anything of the kind."

A sudden thought came to him.

"Will you grant me this favor, then: that you will give me all the square dances?"

She hesitated a moment. Surely she could not make any mistake in giving that promise.

"I do not mind making an agreement for that," she

said, "seeing you are my escort," thinking they certainly would not have more than two or three of them during the entire evening.

"It is so good of you," he murmured. "How can I thank you?"

By this time they had reached the garrison. The music and the hum of voices told them that a goodly number of guests had already arrived. The entrance of General Ormsby's lovely daughter and Captain Lindsay created a great *furor*, and as they saw Cora that night, many of them remembered her to the last day of their lives. Even the officers' wives, who were inclined to be jealous of her when they had heard of her youth and great beauty, could not help but admire her.

The front door of the general's cottage had scarcely closed after Cora, ere Lyle glided down to the living-room from whence she had heard the sound of General Ormsby's voice.

"All alone, and in the dark, general?" she asked, sweetly, as she glided to his side.

"Yes; I was waiting for you to come down," he answered. "We can take our chairs out on the porch and have a long, quiet, uninterrupted talk."

"I should enjoy it by all means," murmured Lyle; "but first let me mix you a glass of toddy—you say you like the way I make it."

"Yes, indeed!" he answered, eagerly, "you are the only one who knows enough to put plenty of rum in it. I like it hot and strong, with only a little lemon flavor."

In less time than it takes to tell it, Lyle had prepared the beverage. He did not notice that she slipped a white powder into the contents of the glass. He drank it at a

single draught, smacking his lips, and declaring it was the finest he had ever tasted.

Five minutes more and he began to nod. Ten minutes, and he was fast asleep.

"He will not waken till broad daylight to-morrow," muttered Lyle. "Sit and talk with you, indeed!" she continued. "Bah!"

Flying to her room, she had barely time to change her dress ere Arthur Rollins came for her.

"Of course Cora is making herself the belle of the ball," she thought.

This was quite the case. Each one of the officers' wives was forced to admit to herself that the general's lovely daughter was as sweet and good and kind of heart as she was fair of face.

Even Julia Gordon could not help feeling kindly instead of hostile toward her.

"Where is your friend, Miss Lyle Warner?" asked one of the ladies. "Surely she will be here this evening, will she not?"

"Oh, yes," said Cora; "she will come later. Ah! there she is now!" she exclaimed, as the door opened to admit the tall, slender figure leaning upon the arm of Arthur Rollins.

There was a momentary hush. Neither the officers nor their wives had ever seen anything like it. She was like an old picture stepping out of a frame. Her dress was one of azure mull, deepening into the bluer shades of violet, while from the clouds of lace her white shoulders and graceful neck rose like the stem of a lily. Her raven-dark hair was done up high on her shapely little head with a cluster of pansies that were knotted at either

shoulder, and which lay half hidden in the meshes of lace on her breast.

Cora looked at her in wonder from across the room. She had never beheld anything quite so striking. Up to the last moment Lyle had declared that she had not the least idea what she should wear, and that it was a pity to wear anything one cared for before army officers and their wives.

"My dress shall not trouble me," she repeated, as though it were a matter of very little concern what she wore.

No wonder that Cora was astounded to see her appear in the grandest costume she had ever laid her eyes on outside of West Point or the metropolis. How handsome Arthur Rollins looked! A great pang of jealousy shot through her heart as she saw Lyle leaning on his arm so radiantly happy.

"He loves her!" she murmured. "Ah! how could he help it! She is the most gloriously beautiful being that I have ever beheld."

Her lips quivered, but she would not let the tears fall, so great was her pride.

When she saw Arthur whirling by in the dance, she turned to Captain Lindsay, saying falteringly:

"You asked me for a waltz just now, and I told you that I was too tired. I have changed my mind. I had only intended to dance the square dances to-night, but I—I will waltz with you now if you still care for it."

"Care for it? It will be heaven on earth for me," whispered the captain, delightedly.

Just at that moment Arthur had excused himself to Lyle, and had started in search of Cora, whom he intended to ask for the waltz that had just struck up. He

turned white to the lips when he saw her whirling by in his rival's arms.

The sight was more than he could calmly endure. How dared he ask Cora to dance; and yet, why not? Was she not known to be heart whole and fancy free? He must see her before the evening was over and have some kind of understanding with her. Despite Lyle's warning, the pain in his heart to see another smiling on her was more than he could bear. The anguish of hope deferred was making him sick to the very soul. He would wait until the dance was ended and seek Cora.

CHAPTER XX.

After several futile attempts to gain a few moments' conversation with Cora, Arthur Rollins said to himself that he must wait until the girl evinced some evidence of wishing to speak with him.

Arthur Rollins could not bear to see Cora and Captain Lindsay apparently enjoying themselves so much. He wished to Heaven he had not come to the ball. The air of the room seemed stifling to him. He longed for a turn or two out on the greensward, in the soft glow of the moonlight, where he could commune with his own thoughts, undisturbed by the babble of meaningless voices—where he would be beyond the sound of the empty compliments of the men and the shrill laughter of the ladies.

Both Lyle and Cora saw him as he slipped out of the room, quite unobserved, as he thought.

Lyle was waltzing with Captain Lindsay, and Cora,

surrounded by a group of admirers, stood underneath an arch of flags.

Arthur paced up and down the long porch, lost in deep thought.

He felt that he was not the only man in the world whose life-dream had been blighted. Ah! if he could but do some great and valiant deed whereby she might be proud of him, he might yet win her love. But opportunity never comes to those who seek it so eagerly.

He stopped a moment by one of the great pillars of the piazza, and looked thoughtfully out over the somber landscape. A great hush lay on the brown, barren plain; not even a night bird was on the wing, hieing to its home; the leaves of the cottonwood-trees were stilled.

Suddenly, as Arthur's keen eyes roamed over the plain, he saw in the distance a black streak, like a long shadow or a fallen tree.

"That is strange," he muttered, quite forgetting himself for a moment. "I did not notice that log there to-day, and I came into camp from that direction. I was tired enough, and I would have sat down there to have rested and brushed up a bit before coming into the range of Cora's vision."

Was it only his fancy, he wondered, or did the log seem longer and a trifle nearer than when he had first observed it?

"I am losing control of myself," he muttered; "I am growing as fanciful as a woman—I, who used to have such cool, steady nerves. Perhaps it is the wide range of vision which affects me so curiously. I think my eyes are deceiving me. That log seems still nearer and longer. It is amazing to me that there are such high

trees around here. I am sure I have not noticed them. Great God! am I mad, or do I dream? There are a dozen logs in sight! and, merciful Heaven, they are moving!"

CHAPTER XXI.

For a moment it seemed to Arthur Rollins that his eyes must be deceiving him. The more he strained his eyes to gaze, the more confused he became. The dark objects seemed to him innumerable.

But one solution presented itself to his mind, and that was—the Indians!

Arthur's face blanched. He realized in an instant what was about to happen.

There was not an instant to be lost. In less time than it takes to tell it, he had ran to the ball-room, into which he leaped through the nearest window.

"The Indians are coming!" shouted Arthur. "The fort is being surrounded!"

In an instant the festivity was turned into a scene of the wildest commotion. The women did not faint, or cry out, or utter any moan. They were the wives, sisters, and daughters of soldiers. They had come to the wild and rugged frontier, fully realizing the perils of the life they had undertaken—perils that might beset them at any moment. They were ready to face the horrors of war—of death, if need be—at the sound of a bugle-call.

With one accord they crept together, not daring to lift their voices to hold their loved ones from duty's call in that trying moment.

Like a flash the officers and men had sprung from their partners' sides in the dance, even before Major Raymond's voice rang out the order:

"Turn out, every man of you—lively! Carbines and revolvers! Jump to arms!"

Across the ball-room sprung the laughing, chaffing, boisterous crowd of a moment before. Away they rushed to the gun-racks, grabbed their carbines and revolvers, hurriedly buckled their cartridge-belts around their waists, and, leaping down the stairs, formed ranks quickly.

The rattle of musketry was followed by the wild, savage yells of the Indians.

Oh! those gallant, loyal hearts! One by one they are lost to view. They take the last look upon their comrades. Obedient to their leader's order, loyal, steadfast, un murmuring to the bitter end, they press forward.

One by one the officers are picked off. Where is Captain Lindsay? They saw him in the ball-room but a moment before. It is evident that he has deserted the ranks in the moment of peril. Down goes the colonel and the major.

"Take command!" cried Major Raymond, faintly, calling out Arthur Rollins' name.

He did take command. Through the bullets that flew like hail-stones Arthur sprung to the front, urging the men on like a tried veteran. Thank Heaven! he had not taken the lead an instant too soon. Into the very teeth of it, rallying the men on all sides of him, he plunged.

They saw an arrow hit him; they saw the warm blood spurt from his white cheek in the clear, bright moonlight. He drew it out and threw it aside, but he never faltered. The soldiers knew that it meant life or death,

and they fairly rained bullets into the black, swarming mass of savages.

"Charge, and fire again!" cried Arthur Rollins, in a husky voice. "For the lives and honor of our women: they must be beaten back!"

Step by step he drives them back—they are cowards, all of them, these Indians—they are terrified as they look at this gallant young giant who advances, mowing them down by scores, and who seems to live a charmed life, and whom neither arrow nor bullet can stop. They retreat, breaking right and left, and amid the terrible slaughter Arthur Rollins stands victor of the great battle, with his little band, panting and exhausted, barely alive, just as the troopers come thundering up to their aid, and fling themselves in a trice from their horses.

This was the last Arthur saw; his courage, which had kept up to the highest pitch during the excitement, could no longer sustain him. The wounds on his face, and the score or more on different parts of his body, were beginning to tell upon him at last. As the commanding officer in charge of the troopers reached him, Arthur sunk down in the midst of his comrades in a death-like swoon.

A week—a long, weary week Arthur Rollins lay unconscious of what was transpiring around him.

When consciousness returned to him, he found himself lying in a darkened room in General Ormsby's quarters, the old general himself bending over him.

He looked up into the drawn, white old face with something very like wonder in his own. His mind was a blank for a moment regarding what had occurred.

"Why am I here, general?" he asked, wonderingly, struggling to a sitting posture. Then he became aware

that his face was bandaged, and that parts of his body were terribly sore.

"What has happened?" he repeated, wonderingly.

General Ormsby tottered up closer to the couch, knelt beside it, and wept as men seldom weep in a life-time.

Arthur Rollins looked at him in wonder too great for words.

"My dear sir," he exclaimed, surprisedly, "I can not understand why you should weep like this."

Suddenly he remembered *all*—the horrible massacre under the light of the moon.

"We saved the fort?" he asked.

General Ormsby nodded.

"Was there great loss of life?" questioned the young man, struggling upon his elbow.

The old general could not answer.

"It seemed their intention to break into the garrison, where the ladies were," resumed Arthur, faintly. "Poor souls! it must have been a terrible ordeal for them! Was your daughter—Miss Ormsby—much terrified?" asked Arthur, wistfully.

Again the old general seemed to sob his heart out.

"Listen, my boy!" he cried. "God save me from going mad while I tell you. Cora, my darling, has suddenly disappeared—they have taken her captive; perhaps they have killed her—or—or worse. The Indians abducted her during the terrible fight."

CHAPTER XXII.

The words which General Ormsby uttered fell upon 'Arthur Rollins' ear like the shock of doom. He scarcely believed that he had heard aright.

"Cora abducted!" he faltered, huskily, as though unable to realize the terrible import the words conveyed.

The old general bowed his head until it rested upon his breast. Words seemed to fail him.

Looking up at him, Arthur saw that what he had heard was indeed true. Long years passing over his head could not have aged the old general as much as this one week had done, owing to the loss of his idolized daughter.

It preyed upon him, driving him to the very verge of madness.

Weak as he was, Arthur struggled up to a sitting posture, his face white as death.

"And while I have been lying here she has been in such terrible danger!" he cried. "Oh, the horror of it!"

"What would you do?" asked General Ormsby, as the young man attempted to put on his clothes.

"I am going to find your daughter Cora and restore her to your arms, if she is living on the face of the earth. If she is dead, I shall devote my life to exterminating every Indian on the frontier, man, woman and child of them!"

General Ormsby laid his shaking hands on his shoulder.

"You are not able to undertake it just yet," he said. "You are too weak. All the very best scouts of the fort are out on her trail. They will find her if—if——"

He could not finish the sentence, but commenced to pace up and down the floor again in the most pitiful

agitation, just as he had paced up and down for the last week by night and by day, scarcely eating or sleeping. But these words by no means assured Arthur nor swayed him from his project. Excitement seemed to lend him new life, despite his weakness.

When the doctor tried to persuade him against this step, he called him to one side, saying hurriedly:

"I will tell a secret to you, doctor—I love the girl better than life itself. It would be a living death of torture to lie here while her fate is in jeopardy!"

"In that case, I will say no more about your going," said the doctor. "I can realize that action would be better for you than inaction in your present state of mind."

In order to let our readers know the terrible fate which had overtaken the general's darling, we must go back to an incident that happened two days before the ball.

It was night, and quite a number of soldiers and half-breeds had gathered together at one of the stores, where one of the sutlers did a thriving trade among the army men and the chiefs of the reservation, which lay some ten miles further on down the river.

Captain Lindsay had just finished the purchase of a package of cigars which was to last him over the evening of the ball.

As he was about to leave the place, some one stepped up to him and tapped him lightly on the shoulder.

Turning abruptly and a little angrily at being so familiarly stopped, he found himself face to face with Joe, a half-breed who had been employed upon one of the steamers that ran up and down the Hudson—that passed West Point—a year or so before.

"What in the world are you doing here?" exclaimed Lindsay, sharply, and a little haughtily.

"I was seized with a notion of visiting old friends and home," replied Joe. "I was greatly surprised to hear that you were here. I like the free-and-easy life on the plains," continued Joe, his swarthy face lighting up, his sharp black eyes sparkling. "I act as interpreter for my tribe—the Sioux. I was at Fort Hadley to see General Ormsby a few days ago, but you did not see me. Your men are not doing right by us," exclaimed the half-breed, bitterly. Our treaty with the Government says we are to have so much ammunition. Your agents refuse to obey that order and drive us further back into the interior of the country day by day."

"Do you suppose we intend to furnish you with arms to come some night and massacre us in our beds?" exclaimed Captain Lindsay.

The half-breed started violently, and muttered something under his breath which the captain did not catch.

"It's all very well to say that you came out here for rest and change," said the captain, jocularly; "but I guess the real truth is, you are wanted in the States, and had to fly."

Again the half-breed regarded him with that strange look in his eyes which might mean nothing or might mean a great deal.

"If I had money enough, I would get back to the States," said the half-breed, doggedly.

Suddenly, as they stood there, a strange thought flashed through the brain of Captain Lindsay—a thought so diabolical that for a moment it almost took his breath away, wicked man though he was. The man before him would be just the one to aid him.

"How much would it take to bring you back to the States, Joe?" he asked.

"Something less than fifty dollars," was the reply.

"If you will help me with a little job, you shall have that amount," said Lindsay, hoarsely.

"I'll do it," said his companion, without stopping to inquire what the little job was that he had on hand.

"You know I helped you out of a scrape or two at the Point that the world was never any the wiser for."

"Hush!" exclaimed Captain Lindsay, looking around sharply; "that's over and past."

"Is there a pretty girl in this affair?" questioned the half-breed.

It was now the captain's turn to flush and look annoyed.

"I don't mind telling you that there is a young girl in the affair," he said, coolly. "Come, we will walk slowly along while we discuss the subject."

After a few moments of silence, Lindsay began slowly: "I'm in love with a pretty girl——"

The half-breed's burst of violent laughter made him turn angrily and sharply about.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked, abruptly.

"You in love?" cried his companion, uproariously. "That's quite a joke, Captain Lindsay."

"Why shouldn't I fall in love?" demanded the captain, biting his under lip savagely.

"I didn't know that you were ever out of love; you know, it was always said that you had a new one for each of the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year."

Lindsay frowned, but he did not utter the sneering retort that sprung to his lips. It was not his intention to make an enemy of the man who knew so much about him, so he concluded that it was best to swallow his chagrin.

"After you get through laughing," he said, "I will go on."

"Go right ahead," retorted his companion; "never mind me, captain."

"Well," said Lindsay, "I am in love with General Ormsby's daughter; but the fact is, the girl isn't in love with me. There's a handsome dude up there who seems to have completely won her fancy. I want to put a stop to the thing before this love-making goes any further."

"Why don't you give him a dose of that?" said the half-breed, reaching over and tapping the revolver which the captain always carried in his pocket.

"The fellow seems to have a charmed life," declared the captain; "bullets whistle by him. I saw a horse throw him two days ago, and he landed on his feet like a cat. Anybody else would have been killed! It is his feats of daring which have won this girl's love. Now, I want to do something quite as daring in her eyes. To make a long story short, I want you to prowl around the fort on the night of the ball, and abduct her. I will then prove to be the hero in the case. I will rescue her from you, apparently at the risk of my life; that will give me a hold on her favor. Do you understand?"

The man nodded.

"Do you think it can be accomplished?"

"It has been done before, hasn't it?" said Joe, looking the captain fully in the face, "and——"

The rest of the sentence was finished in a whisper.

CHAPTER XXIII.

For an hour or more Captain Lindsay and Joe paced up and down the banks of the river, laying their diabolical plans.

At last it was settled, and they parted. Captain Lindsay walked hurriedly back to the fort, and Joe pursued his way in long swinging strides toward the Sioux village.

When the fusillade had commenced, and bullets poured in through the windows and doors like hail, and the excitement became intense, Captain Lindsay, unnoticed by every one save Cora, beat an ignominious retreat.

This cowardly act, in the moment of their greatest peril, aroused all the anger and disgust in Cora's nature. But she had scarcely any time for thought, as she was suddenly seized from behind by a pair of strong arms that had reached in from an open window against where she leaned.

In less time than it takes to tell it, she had been drawn through, a thick blanket was thrown suddenly over her head, and some one bore her swiftly out into the night air. Her terrified shrieks were smothered by the blanket that was wrapped about her, and she felt herself being lifted upon a horse. The noise and din of the terrible battle which was raging completely drowned her wild cries.

Through sheer terror, Cora fainted dead away in the strong grasp of her captor.

The hour in which Cora returned to consciousness was the bitterest of her life. She woke to find herself amid such strange surroundings, that for the moment it seemed

to her that she must still be in some horrible dream—that she was the victim of some terrible nightmare, from which she would presently arouse.

She was lying on a couch of furs—deer-skins—with a white tent above her head. Through the opening the stars in the night-sky were plainly visible. By the entrance, before a camp-fire of burning fagots, knelt a young Sioux maiden, beside an older woman, both regarding the dark figure within the tent with great curiosity.

Cora struggled to her feet in bewilderment, a wild cry breaking from her lips as the truth dawned upon her that this was no dream, but a horrible reality.

She was in the midst of hated foes—the Sioux—upon whom the soldiers at Fort Hadley were raging such deadly warfare.

In an instant she remembered all—some one suddenly grasping her from behind, the heavy blanket that was thrown over her to stifle her wild cries and desperate struggles, the wild ride over miles and miles, then darkness and oblivion.

With a cry of terror, Cora sprung from the couch and would have rushed through the entrance had not the unwieldy figure of one of the women barred the exit.

“Let me go—let me go!” panted Cora. “Do not attempt to detain me!”

The woman jesticulated sharply, answering in a guttural voice, and pushed the girl violently backward.

The shrieking, screaming mob crowded about the tent in which Cora sat, their wild, glaring eyes, terrible gesticulations, and high-pitched angry voices making her almost die with terror.

In the midst of them—ay, the foremost of them—she

saw the horrible creature whose face she had but an instantaneous glimpse of as he snatched her through the window.

He stepped forward without any ceremony, and entered the tent.

"Hush!" he cried, as the girl started to her feet, screaming with terror.

"Do not dare to come near me!" cried Cora, cowering back from him as though he were a poisonous cobra coiled there waiting to strike her to death with a venomous blow.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Hush!" he said, for the third time, holding up his hand to her, and speaking in very good English; "you anger my people."

"Why did you take me from my father and those who love me?" she wailed, piteously. "If it was for money, take me back and my father will pay you handsomely."

Joe smiled, showing his white teeth.

"You are the daughter of General Ormsby," he said. "Once he had me arrested for stealing a bit of rope; true, there was a horse at the other end of it, and I did time for it—a year. I vowed vengeance on him, and now I see my way clear to it. I did not dream you were *his* daughter until I saw your face. You are like him; there is no mistaking that. I could not have struck a blow at his heart a surer way."

"What are you—man, or fiend incarnate?" cried Cora.

“Do not strike at my dear old father’s heart through his only child, whom he loves dearer than life itself.”

Three days passed, and, to Cora’s intense relief, Joe, the half-breed, did not put in an appearance again.

He seemed to be gone off on some mission; but those with whom he had left her watched her every move so intently that escape was impossible. She made one or two attempts to escape, but it seemed only to call down the fury of the Sioux upon her, and her life now hung in such jeopardy that another attempt would have caused them to take her life then and there.

The woman whom the half-breed had left standing guard never left her for an instant.

All in vain Cora knelt and prayed to her, and tried to make her understand.

She might as well have prayed to an image carved in stone.

He had cautioned them well upon this point. When he had disappeared he had gone directly back to Fort Hadley, and hung about the outskirts of the camp until he could secure an interview with Captain Lindsay without being observed.

He knew it would mean death to him if any of the soldiers or officers of the garrison sighted him. He learned, too, that dispatches had been sent to the nearest posts, and that several regiments of cavalry had been sent on to Fort Hadley to wage a mighty war upon the tribe for their late uprising, to drive them from the country, or to bring them into subjection.

He knew it was the disappearance of the girl that had brought this about, and that they would leave no stone unturned to find her whereabouts, and deal out justice upon the whole Sioux nation.

He had foreseen all this, but he did not care.

On the third day that he had lain in ambush about the fort he came face to face with the very man he was in search of—Captain Lindsay.

Furious with rage, he sprung toward the half-breed.

“What have you done with the girl?” he cried, hoarsely.

“Don’t get excited!” cried Joe, shaking himself free from the other’s grasp. “She’s safe; what more do you want?”

“You have broken faith with me. You were to take her to the bend in the road and wait for me there.”

“Take me to her at once!” cried Captain Lindsay, imperiously. “Three days in your hands! Great God! the girl must be almost dead with terror. If I find that you have harmed one hair of her head, I’ll have your life for it!”

“No threats!” said the half-breed, doggedly.

“Where is she?” demanded Captain Lindsay.

“Let money ask that question for you. Fork over that fifty dollars you promised.”

“Not until you place the girl in my hands.”

The half-breed laughed a low, exultant laugh.

“We may as well understand each other,” he said.

“You will have to make it a round five hundred, or the girl stays where she is!”

“Great Heaven!” cried Captain Lindsay. “You can not mean it!”

“You must raise it,” replied the half-breed; “or the girl will live and die among the Sioux!”

CHAPTER XXV.

All in vain Captain Lindsay threatened and swore at the man who stood there. He was inexorable.

He dared not betray to his companions at Fort Hadley the fact that he knew of Cora's whereabouts, for the truth would leak out that he had been mixed up in the conspiracy. Then the rage of the soldiers would be so great that they would not even let him have a trial, but would make a target of him.

No, he must win the half-breed over to his way of thinking, and release Cora by strategy from her perilous surroundings.

All arguing was lost upon the half-breed.

"Five hundred dollars is my price," he declared. "If you want the girl, you must raise that amount, or keep still."

Captain Lindsay swallowed his chagrin as best he could.

"I will see if it is possible for me to raise it," he said, at length. "If I can do so, I will see you in a couple of days."

Turning abruptly, he left him standing there.

The half-breed looked after him with a low, cunning smile.

"He will raise that amount of money somehow," he muttered, triumphantly. "And after I have that much in my hand, I'll raise it another hundred before I deliver General Ormsby's daughter to him."

"I don't know but that I'd like her myself," he soliloquized. "She hates me; but then, women often change

their minds. I'm not such a bad-looking fellow, anyhow."

His reverie came to an abrupt ending, for at that moment he espied, lying full length under one of the cotton-wood trees, the figure of a man.

He approached him with a cat-like tread, and saw that he was sleeping. At that moment he caught sight of a chain which the sleeping man was wearing.

He bent over him cautiously, and was just about to appropriate it and the watch to which it was attached, when the sleeper suddenly awoke.

He comprehended the situation in an instant, and in less time that it takes to tell it, he had caught the half-breed by the shoulder, and administered to him the soundest thrashing he had ever received in his life.

"Now, be gone!" he cried, pointing down the path, "before I give vent to my anger again and give you a little more of the same kind of sauce."

"I will pay you back for this!" panted Joe, when he got quite out of reach of the other's long, swinging, muscular arms. "You will rue *this* day, mark my words!"

The young man laughed at his threat.

"I have no fear of a barking dog," he declared.

"I can bite as well as bark!" yelled Joe, white with rage.

"Say this to yourself—Arthur Rollins has no fear of any man living!" replied the young man, calmly. "Jot that down in your memory, will you?"

The name seemed to fairly electrify the half-breed.

"Ah! that is the name of the man Captain Lindsay had spoken about as being his rival, the one whom the pretty Cora cared for. We shall meet again, Arthur

Rollins," he declared; "and mark me well, you will rue that time most bitterly!"

It was the noon of the following day after the little incident which we have just narrated, that fate opened out a way for Arthur Rollins.

He was hurrying along by the banks of the river, when he suddenly heard sounds of horses' hoofs galloping madly down the road. Looking ahead, he saw that it was an Indian pony ridden by a Sioux maiden, and that the animal was certainly running away with the girl.

Arthur knew that they must pass the spot where he stood. It took him but an instant's time to decide upon his course of action.

Winding his left arm firmly around the trunk of a tree, he waited motionless for the infuriated animal to approach.

"Courage!" he cried to the excited girl, who was about to fling herself from the animal's back.

But if she heard she did not heed him. For an instant she swayed to and fro like a leaf in a gale; the next moment, just as she was abreast of him, and he reached out his hand to grasp the flying reins, the girl fell headlong from the saddle, and was precipitated down the rocky embankment into the creek below.

Like a flash, Arthur brought the horse to a standstill, and threw the reins over the limb of a tree. Having secured the rearing, panting animal, he jumped at once to the assistance of the maiden.

He found her lying half in half out of the water. She was not unconscious from her terrible fall, but moaning with pain.

In less time than it takes to tell it, Arthur had lifted

her in his strong arms, bore her up the embankment, and placed her beneath the shade of a cotton-wood tree.

"Are you badly hurt?" he asked, anxiously.

"I—I think I have sprained my ankle," answered the girl, faintly, in remarkably good English. "Perhaps I have broken it."

Arthur removed the small moccasin and the leather leggin that enveloped her foot.

"The limb is not broken," he said; "but you have succeeded in giving yourself a terrible sprain. Good heavens! that confounded horse has managed to get free, and he is off!"

"What shall I do?" moaned the girl, piteously, as she wrung her hands and sobbed convulsively.

"You mean, how will you get back to your people?"

She nodded.

"To which village do you belong?" he asked.

"The nearest one; but it is some five miles distant," she answered.

"There is no other way than for me to carry you a little way at a time, giving me an opportunity to rest, and I think I will be able to get you there before dark."

"You are good and kind," faltered the girl. "I—I thought all white men were cruel."

"Who told you that?—your people?"

She nodded her dark head.

"You must not believe all you hear," said Arthur, briefly, as he set to work bathing the injured ankle to keep down the swelling.

Slender as the girl was, she was no easy burden to carry.

Every few rods he was obliged to sit her down and rest with her.

He knew that she must be suffering the most intense agony, and he knew, too, that she was trying to keep it from him, by the way in which she bit her lips to keep back the groans that rose to them.

He did his best to draw her mind away from her suffering.

They made slow progress, as Arthur had predicted.

The dusk crept up and the night darkened about them ere the last mile was traversed.

"We can never get there!" cried the girl, her courage giving out at last.

"Oh, yes, we will," said Arthur. "It is just a little way further. We will be able to see your camp from the top of the hill yonder."

The words had barely left his lips ere he heard a terrible yell proceed from a clump of trees but a few rods distant, and in another instant he found himself surrounded by a score or more of Sioux. When they saw who it was the white man carried in his arms, they were fairly stricken dumb.

One of the Sioux had shot at him with an arrow as they advanced. When they reached Arthur's side, they saw him stagger and fall heavily to the ground with his burden.

The girl's anger knew no bounds.

Rapidly, in her own language, she explained what had occurred—that the man whom they had just shot down had saved her life.

"Will he live or die?" she cried, sinking on her knees beside him, all unmindful of her own excruciating pain. "Some of you lift him and take him to the village."

They dared not disobey her command, for Minnewaska's word was law to them.

The excitement was great when they reached the village and discovered what had happened to the girl.

"Let him be cared for until he recovers," she cried, pointing to Arthur.

And, although there was much grumbling and muttering among them, yet no one dared say "nay."

When Arthur came to his senses he found himself in a tent, lying upon a pile of soft bear-skins.

Outside he heard the mutterings of guttural voices. The pain in his head was intense. He sunk back with a groan.

He had no idea of what had happened after he received that stinging blow in the head.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Hearing a slight movement close beside him, Arthur opened his eyes and glanced up. He saw a woman coming through the door of the tent. She came hastily up to his rude couch and flung herself on her knees beside him, repeatedly kissing his hand and gesticulating volubly.

Arthur, however, could not understand what she said. He imagined that she must be the mother of the girl whom he had rescued, as she had the same cast of features.

"That's all right, my good woman," he said, hoping that she could understand him better than he did her. "I

know you are grateful, and all that; but I did no more for the girl than I would have done for another in the same situation. I am afraid your people have done me up. Why are these bandages around my head?"

He could not understand her gesticulations, nor the reply that she made him; he only knew that she was pressing him back against the furs, as though she wished him to lie there and not struggle to his feet.

She disappeared quite as suddenly as she had entered the tent, and a few minutes later returned with a steaming hot potion in a wooden bowl, which she indicated was for him to drink.

A thousand thoughts passed through his brain. Should he take it? Dare he take it?

She pressed the bowl to his lips; he was too weak to resist, and in a moment he had drained its contents to the dregs.

"Kill or cure," he said to himself, "I may as well down it."

The effect upon him was most exhilarating. It seemed to relieve him at once of all pain, and shortly afterward he dropped into a deep slumber which was unbroken for long hours.

It was two weeks before Arthur Rollins was able to sit up, and the first person whom he saw, when he was able to walk to the door of his tent, was Minnewaska, keeping watch outside.

"I am so thankful that you were not seriously injured," she said, kneeling before him and reverentially kissing the hem of his coat. "I was coming in to see you to-day," she went on, in a voice of great agitation; "for I have something to tell you—something which you must know."

She took a hasty glance around, as though to make sure that she was not observed.

"The men are all out on a hunt," she explained; "so I chose this opportunity to come here and talk with you."

"Your ankle is better, then?" he said, interrogatively.

"Almost well," she answered. "The pain is now so slight that I do not mind it much. The men of the village like you not," she continued. "They make schemes to destroy you. You must leave here this very night. I will help you. Ah! I would do anything in my power to aid you, you were so good to me! If you ever get into trouble, and Minnewaska can save you, she will do it, even with the sacrifice of her life, if necessary. Or, if she can help you in any way, you will have but to speak and tell her what to do."

"You can help me," answered Arthur, quickly—oh, so much, my dear girl, that my gratitude to you would be eternal!"

He made a *confidante* of the maiden and told her the story of Cora—how he loved her, and was wearing his heart out searching for her.

He saw her start as she listened.

"She is either hidden in some of the Indian villages, or dead!" he muttered, huskily. "If you would serve me, find out for me where she is, if she is still alive."

A strange light came over her face.

"Rest in peace hereafter. I know where she is," she said. "She is alive and well."

Arthur's joy at hearing this can better be imagined than told.

"Tell me where she is," he said.

"In this village, where they hold her captive."

"Take me to her," cried Arthur, excitedly, "and you will earn my everlasting gratitude."

The girl held up her hand.

"Not now," she said. "I will take any message from you. If you were seen going by that tent, even by the women, they would make a target of you. Remain where you are."

"Tell her that I have been out searching for her ever since her disappearance," he said, huskily. "Tell her I will give every drop of my heart's blood to rescue her from this place, and to restore her to the arms of her father and her friends at Fort Hadley. You will not forget all that I have said, my dear girl?" he questioned, anxiously.

She shook her head.

"Repeat it after me, until I see whether you have it right," he said, looking eagerly down into her face.

Slowly she repeated the sentence word for word, but in her own way.

"Yes, that is right," he said. "I see you have a great memory. Go quickly with the message to Cora, I pray you, and return to me with her reply."

He watched her intently as she turned and walked slowly away, to see which direction she took; but, as though aware of this, the maid took a zig-zag path that led in quite an opposite direction. Not that she meant to throw her handsome young rescuer off the track of finding the tent of the girl he loved; but she knew intuitively that many eyes were watching her through rents in several of the tents, and it would not do to go direct to the tent of the lily-white maid, as they called Cora.

The woman hated the beautiful white girl for her

beauty, and for the admiration she created in the breasts of the Sioux braves.

"How strange that he should love the girl that has been brought here!" muttered Minnewaska, as she limped painfully along. "How long have I lain on my deer-skin couch, night after night, and thought of him, while the stars shone in the sky until they grew pale in the light of the coming dawn!

"I saved him from their wrath because he was so good to me. I would have done anything for him—ay, given him my love, if he had asked for it, and would have married him.

"He loves another! I could cheat her—never tell her of his message—if I wanted to, and then the wedding which they have planned for to-night, which gives the lily-white maid to Joe, the half-breed, would take place. It would be too late on the morrow for her handsome, pale-faced lover to interfere.

"But would it be right? Let me think. Ah! let Minnewaska think.

"He will go far away, and take her with him, and I shall never see him again. The moons will come and set, and I shall never see him."

Over and over again Minnewaska turned the situation in her mind.

So intent had she been in her musings that she scarcely realized how far she had walked, until she saw the tent that was occupied by Cora lying just ahead of her.

She paused; the lovely maiden had new interest for her now.

Involuntarily she crept closer, and gazed eagerly within. Cora was pacing up and down within the narrow tent,

while one of the women sat close by, heedless of the girl's abject sorrow.

Minnewaska had learned the English language from Joe, the half-breed, and was, in his absence, the only interpreter for the chiefs in the village. She was the only one who could understand Cora's piteous and constant appeal to be set free. The dusky Indian maid drew nearer still, and watched Cora.

She had never seen anything like her. Her skin was white as snow, her hair more golden than the sunshine, and her eyes as blue as the sky above.

A great bitterness filled Minnewaska's heart. If he had not seen her, with all her fair, god-like beauty, perhaps he would have cared for herself.

Perhaps this girl loved the handsome pale-faced hero even as *she* loved him.

She must know, she told herself; she must find out the truth from this girl's lips.

"Three weeks, ay, nearly a month, I have been suffering the agony of death here," moaned Cora, wringing her hands, "and yet no one comes to rescue me. I can not endure it. Surely Heaven would find mercy for me if I laid my burden down and ended it all. The wretched creature who tore me from home and friends vows that he will make me his bride on the morrow. But he shall see! He has goaded me on to madness; he shall find out how it will end. I will kill myself; better that than to suffer any more!"

Suddenly she felt a light touch on her arm, and turning quickly, she beheld the little Indian maid who often looked in and spoke to her as she passed the tent.

She was the only one whom Cora could make understand her great desire for freedom; but the girl always

shook her head, declaring she could not release her ; that it would be as much as her life was worth to try it, and advised her to try and reconcile herself to the future the Sioux had marked out for her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Cora was thankful beyond words to see who was standing before her.

"Why have you stayed away from me so long," she sobbed, holding out both hands to her, "when you knew how very wretched I was?"

"Because you always asked me to help you to escape, and I could not ; so I did not come where you were."

Cora caught both her hands in hers.

"Supposing that some one should take *you* away from your people and place you among strangers who hated you, and who would have been glad to see you die at any moment, to be thrust without a word from those whom you love with all your heart and those who love you?"

"Tell me," said Minnewaska, "did those who love you make search for you, do you think?"

"My father could not ; he is too old."

"Is there another—a lover, who would search for you?"

"Yes," said Cora, tears filling her eyes and rolling down her cheeks, "there is another who loved me once very dearly, and another girl came between us ; but I think the very night I was taken away he was learning

to care for me again. I am sure he will search for me. My heart tells me that he will."

"And if he found you would you marry him?"

"Oh, yes—yes!" Cora answered.

The Indian maid looked very gravely into the tearful blue eyes.

"What is his name?" she asked—"this young hero whom you love?"

"You have never heard of him, you will never see him. Why do you ask this of me?"

"It would ease my heart to know," said the maiden.

Cora was too agitated to notice how husky and broken her voice was.

"He is indeed a hero," said Cora; "and his name, well—is—Arthur Rollins."

"I—I have seen him," said Minnewaska.

"You have seen him?" cried Cora, incredulously. "How can that be? You must be mistaken."

The maid shook her head, toying nervously at the beads she wore at her throat.

"He was here in our village a short time ago."

Cora fairly gasped for breath, so startling was this intelligence.

"Here?" she cried. "Oh, he must have been searching for me! Tell me, my good girl; for the love of Heaven, speak quickly, is he here now?"

"Y-e-s," she answered.

Before Cora had a chance to speak another word, the maiden had passed out, whispering in a low voice as she went past her:

"Be ready to fly with him to-night. I will come for

you when the moon rises, and when the day breaks you will be far away."

Cora could hardly believe that she had heard aright, so wondrous was the news.

She felt like screaming aloud in the wild exuberance of her joy.

Arthur was in the village; he had come to rescue her at last! It seemed to her she must die of very joy. Every moment would seem an age to her. How would he succeed in rescuing her from the toils of this lynx-eyed creature who had watched her so continuously by night and by day for long, weary weeks? She did not know when the woman took time to sleep, so constant was her vigil.

At last the shadows in the tent began to lengthen and darken, and the old woman bustled around the tent setting things to rights. For the first time since she had been there, Cora noticed that she did not sit down after her supper and smoke her bamboo pipe, as she was in the habit of doing. She generally dozed over it a little. Was she afraid of growing sleepy to-night? Cora prayed fervently to Heaven that she might be got out of the way somehow.

As she eagerly watched the dark forms running to and fro, getting ready for their fires and their dance when the braves should return home, she saw Minnewaska stealing along carrying a jug upon her shoulder.

The woman saw her, too, as she seemed to be hurrying past, and straightway ran out and hailed her.

She appeared to be insisting upon tasting of the contents of the jug, and the girl seemed to be just as unwilling to permit her to do so. Taking it away from

Minnewaska by main force, she raised it to her lips and proceeded to take a long draught of it ere Minnewaska succeeded in getting it back from her.

Cora could not understand the strange smile that flitted over the girl's face a moment after as she nodded toward her. She realized very soon after what that meaning look meant, when she saw her jailer nod to and fro as though unable to keep her eyes open.

At length she succumbed altogether, and with a thud that Cora was sure would break every bone in her fat body, she rolled over on the floor of the tent, her senses locked in a deep slumber.

It was the first time that she had ever been off her guard for long, weary weeks. Cora hurried past her to the door of the tent, and peered eagerly about her into the fast gathering darkness.

At that moment Minnewaska appeared, gliding swiftly toward her.

"Come," she said, taking Cora by the hand; "your lover awaits you at the turn of the road."

Cora was about to spring out through the door of the tent, when her companion held her back.

"You must not go like *that*," she said. "You must dress as I am, or you will be captured at once. Then they would be sure to take terrible vengeance upon you!"

"What can I do?" cried Cora, wringing her hands and turning to her wildly.

Minnewaska pointed to her prostrate keeper.

"Take *her* things," she said, "and leave yours. Come; I will help you with them."

They did not fit Cora in any way.

"I will help you out," said her companion. "You shall take mine."

"What will *you* do?" cried Cora, anxiously.

"Never mind me; only look out for yourself."

"Where is the bend in the road?" cried Cora.

"I will take you to it," was the whispered reply; "but it will require some courage to do it, for you must pass through the heart of the village—its entire length. Detection would be fatal to you. It would mean instant death. You still say you wish to risk it?"

White as death, Cora faced her.

"Yes, I will risk it, no matter what comes of it," she said. "Better death than to wed the horrible wretch who vows he will make me his bride to-morrow. Lead the way."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Come," said Minnewaska, breaking in upon her musings; "we must start at once; we have no time to lose. Ere the moon is another hour higher the braves will be returning, and then—— But we will not look forward to any ills that might happen."

"I am ready," said Cora, stepping out of the tent, without one backward glance at the narrow quarters in which she had been forced to remain a long, weary month that seemed an eternity.

Cora sprung to her feet with the agility of a deer. At that moment Minnewaska joined her.

"Come," she said; "we must fly while the excitement is at its height if you would be free!"

For answer, Cora placed her hands in hers.

Stealthily and swiftly as shadows they made their way among the groups gathered here and there, keeping their faces turned from the camp-fire, and crouched down in the grass when they found that they attracted attention.

A wild cry sounded from over the hills, terribly near now.

"That is Joe, the half-breed's cry," said Minnewaska, in a whisper. "He is returning to-night, instead of to-morrow, as every one supposed he would do, and I feel sure that he intends the marriage to take place to-night."

"Oh, let us fly—let us fly!" cried Cora, keeping herself from shrieking by the greatest effort.

"Hush! Do not let them see you so violently agitated," said her companion; "it would never do. Come; walk steadily and carelessly behind me. Remember that freedom lies at the end of this path. It all depends upon yourself."

Cora was too much agitated to even hear what she was saying. She dimly realized only one thing, and that was: that she must save Arthur from the fate that awaited him.

The Sioux were so near now that she could hear their shouts.

"Have we much further to go?" panted Cora.

"Half a mile or more; but that is not far. You have run the gantlet so far, surely you will not fail at the last moment."

"But *he*, will they not find *him*?" gasped Cora, almost beside herself with terror. "They are coming from the very direction which we are taking. Hark! what does that terrible shout mean?" whispered Cora.

"Ah, great Father! I fear they have found your lover!" moaned her companion.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Cora could not have grown any whiter, though the words which her companion had uttered—"those shouts mean that they must have found your lover"—seemed to break her heart then and there.

"Let us fly to him!" she repeated in a voice of terror.

"You need not fear to fly as swiftly as you can. I will keep up with you. Do not fear for me! I will take you at your word," said Minnewaska. "Come!"

Like two arrows from their bows they shot forward.

So great was the excitement of the men and women running hither and thither, that Cora prayed no one would notice them.

"Come!" she cried, "and quickly."

Following Minnewaska's steps closely, she soon found herself beyond the last tent.

"Do you see that bunch of cotton-wood trees just ahead, close to the river?" she asked.

"Yes," said Cora.

"That is where he was to have waited for you, if he escaped himself."

"Do you think there is any possibility of his having failed to do so? Would we not have heard of it in that case?"

"I feel sure that he got away in safety, for I helped him," said Minnewaska in a low voice. "Then I returned to you. I saw him beyond the end of the village; we would have heard the uproar if any one had noticed his flight, quite the same as in your case. Do you think you could reach the cotton-wood trees alone? It is not safe for me to venture any further with you; I would

be missed. It would be best for me to be in the village and keep them from coming this way in search for you."

"You are quite right," said Cora. "I can not find words in which to thank you for what you have done for me. I pray that we may meet again, Minnewaska, and if we ever do, you shall not find that my gratitude has waned."

For one moment they clasped each other's hands and looked into each other's faces in the moonlight; the next instant the Indian maid was vanishing like a small cloud in the distance, and Cora was left alone on the broad plains in the darkness of the night. Slowly the moon began to pierce through the dense clouds. Cora prayed that they would obscure it until she reached the cotton-wood trees that loomed blackly before her in the distance.

The terrible excitement through which she had just gone was beginning to tell upon her. It seemed to her as though she would never reach her destination—where Arthur must be awaiting her—Arthur and freedom!

Ah! how sweet the words sounded to her!

Her feet were beginning to lag, tired nature was commencing to assert itself, despite her courage and valiant spirit.

She was so tired she could scarcely take another step; she was beginning to lag, with the goal almost in reach.

Her head, too, began to throb. Ah! would she never reach that clump of cotton-wood trees? Suddenly, directly in the path before her, a dark figure loomed up, and advanced toward her with long, swinging strides. She could not get away, she could not turn and fly. She was like an exhausted bird who flutters down directly

in the sportsman's sight, realizing its danger, but incapable of flight.

Cora's senses began to whirl. Without a moan or a cry she fell headlong to the earth in a little heap just as a dark figure reached her side.

It was Arthur. He could not wait until she reached the cotton-wood trees, but came hurrying forth to meet her.

Realizing that she had fainted, he caught her in his strong arms, and called her name over and over again, begging her to open her dear eyes and look at him, speak to him, the while covering her face and hands with passionate kisses.

He carried her to a little stream near by, laved her face with its cooling waters, and in a few moments more he was rewarded by seeing her open her eyes.

"Oh, Arthur, is it you?" she cried, clinging to him, and sobbing as though her heart would break. "Are we safe—have we really escaped from the terrible Sioux?"

"Yes, we have escaped, but we are not yet safe," he answered. "Every moment that we loiter here is fraught with the greatest possible danger of recapture. We must make all haste and try to reach the nearest fort before we are discovered. You are so faint and weak, I fear we shall not be able to make much progress."

"You had better go and leave me," she answered. "I shall but hamper you."

"Do not pain me, Cora, by saying anything like that," he said, huskily. "I can not bear it. I would rather leave my heart behind me than you. Life would be nothing to me if I had not found you and saved you! But come; every moment is precious to us. They may miss us at any instant. In the clump of bushes yonder are

two ponies. Do you think you could ride one of them—a desperate ride, if need be?”

“Yes,” she said.

He noticed that it was as much as she could do, even though she leaned heavily on his arm, to make her way to the cotton-wood trees, and it was more difficult still to mount into the saddle. By this he knew how exhausted she must be, owing to the thrilling experience through which she had just passed.

They had barely got seated in their saddles ere they heard a wild cry resound on the still air.

“They have missed us, I am sure!” cried Arthur.

At that moment there fell distinctly on their ears the wild yelling of the Sioux, the clatter of hoofs, and the neighing of the Indian ponies.

“God be with us!” muttered Arthur in a low, hoarse cry.

CHAPTER XXX.

Arthur had decided to make for Fort Hadley at the start; but when he found the Indians so close upon his track, and saw that they were circling round toward the west (the course which they had taken would bring them between the fort and himself), he realized that he must turn directly to the east, and try to reach Fort Bailey.

“Thank God you are so brave!” cried Arthur, turning to Cora. “You are a general’s daughter, and you show it!”

They had come five, seven miles, on that desperate,

dead run. The ponies were only flesh and blood, they could not stand everything. He realized that they must commence to waver soon. Something must be done by strategy.

In less than twenty minutes' time their foes will be within reach of them. They enter the ravine, the horses thundering like mad. For a moment they are out of sight of their pursuers. Capture and instant death stare them both in the face if they are overtaken. There is but one chance. He does not have a moment of time to speak to Cora about it. He must act, and quickly.

As they near a small clump of cotton-wood trees he makes his decision. Quick as thought he leans over and snatches Cora from the saddle, springing that same moment from his own.

Desperation gives him the strength of a lion.

He clambers up the tree with his precious burden strained close to his heart, and the thick leaves mercifully shade them.

The horses, relieved of their burdens, go tearing down the ravine at a mad pace.

There had not been an instant's pause from the mad clatter of their hoofs to warn the pursuing foes that any change had taken place. At that instant the moon went behind a cloud. Surely Heaven was merciful, he thought.

On, on, they came, yelling and shouting, like the rush of the wind, a veritable pandemonium of excited, blood-thirsty savages.

Down the deep ravine they thundered. One instant more and they were abreast of the tree. He dared not even breathe, lest their sharp ears should detect it.

As they dashed on, one of the Sioux turned and said something to his companion about the tree. For an

instant all eyes turned in that direction. Arthur's heart stood still. He lived hours in that one second. Would the foremost Sioux who had called attention to the tree draw rein?

God! the man paused, and lagged behind the rest.

Arthur's trembling hand stole to his breast-pocket, and he drew out his revolver, and pressed it close to the temple of the beautiful girl that was resting so heavily against his shoulder.

Another instant—that seemed the length of eternity—and the Sioux thundered on to overtake his companions.

With a long-drawn, quivering breath of excitement Arthur restored the revolver to his breast-pocket.

He realized that the Sioux would soon overtake the ponies ahead, and finding out that they had been tricked, their anger would know no bounds. He must make for the bank of the creek with his unconscious burden.

It was no easy matter to convey Cora thither, for she was a dead weight in his arms.

When at length he gained the creek, and applied the cool water to the girl's face, she quickly revived.

He did not have to explain to her all that had happened.

"We have escaped!" she cried, clinging to him.

"We are not yet out of danger," he said.

"Are we to go in that little boat?" she cried, faintly.

A cry of joy broke from Arthur's lips.

"I did not see it before!" he cried. "That is just what will save us."

It was a very small skiff, fastened to an overhanging sapling.

In less time than it takes to tell it, he had placed Cora in it, caught up the oars, and was soon pulling for dear

life down the stream. The great strain was beginning to tell upon him.

Suddenly the oars slipped from Arthur's grasp.

"My God, Cora, it's all up with me! They have hit me this time. I—I fear I am dying!"

"Oh, no, no!" the girl cried piteously; "do not say that, or I shall die too."

"Take the oars, and—and do the best you can," cried Arthur. "Never mind me."

He sunk into the bottom of the boat as he spoke. Cora *did* take the oars and wield them with a will.

Suddenly the flying arrows about her ceased; the yells seemed to grow fainter and fainter. What could it mean?

Perhaps they were launching skiffs and pursuing them. Surely it must be that.

At a sudden bend in the river she saw that the water was divided here—the stream was divided and flowed in two directions. She knew that one of them led to the fort, the other one directly through an Indian village some few miles distant from the one in which she had been held captive.

Which stream should she take?

"Heaven direct me," said the girl faintly, raising her pale face to the starlit heavens. "I—I will take the stream to the right. Surely God will not let me go astray!"

She turned her skiff hastily to the right, and commenced to pull hard against the stream, but it seemed to move on very slowly.

On and on she rowed until her arms gave out, and she could not pull another stroke if her life had depended

upon it. She was obliged to let the boat drift on whither it would.

Why were the Sioux so quiet? What terrible danger did their silence portend?

Ever and anon she glanced over her shoulder. There was nothing in sight, no sound broke upon the stillness of the night.

Was Arthur, who was still lying in the bottom of the boat, dead or dying?

She called to him piteously; but there was no sound, not even the sound of a breath. With a wild, bitter cry, Cora sunk down on her knees in the boat, calling his name over and over again.

Her hand came in contact with his face; it was still warm. She placed her hand over his heart! Oh, joy beyond words, it beat faintly! he still lived.

She reached over the boat and caught cooling water in her hands and laved his face with it as he had done for her. She was rewarded by hearing a faint moan from his lips, and a moment after he opened his eyes.

"Thank God you are not dead!"

"No," he answered, faintly. "It is not even a mortal wound that I have received, still, it is very painful. An arrow pierced my shoulder. I meant not to succumb to it, but I think I must have done so through sheer weakness. Where are we now? What has become of our foes?"

"I do not know," said Cora; and then she proceeded to tell him just what had occurred during his brief unconsciousness, then she told him of the two streams.

"Which did you take?" asked Arthur, hoarsely.

"The one to the right," she answered.

"God have pity on us!" he sobbed rather than spoke.

"Every moment that we are going in this direction we are drifting further away from friends, and nearer to the very heart of the camp of the Sioux. Turn the boat, for Heaven's sake, if you can. If not, we are surely lost!"

He saw that she was unable to do so it—her strength was gone.

CHAPTER XXXI.

'As day after day dragged their slow lengths by, and no tidings reached the fort of the whereabouts of Arthur Rollins, who had kept up a continual search for Cora, the agony of his friends began to increase hourly.

General Ormsby had long since ceased to pace the floor until gray dawn had stolen in upon his misery, and had settled down into a state of melancholy, shutting himself away entirely from all his friends, save the old house-keeper and one or two commanding officers, with whom he was obliged to communicate; yet even these saw very little of him.

Now was the time to turn the tide of affairs in her own favor, Miss Bitterwood told herself, after vainly attempting to form some plan to bring her niece and the general more frequently into each other's presence.

Delays were dangerous, she told herself; and her woman's intuition led her to believe that the breach between them was widening daily.

One day she came to Lyle's room with a frown of im-

patience on her face, and sternly demanded an interview with that impetuous beauty.

"You are ruining *your* prospects, as well as making *my* life a continually worrisome one," she said, fretfully. "There is a limit to all things, and the end of this affair will be, you will have to go back to your old life of toil and hardship, unless you make a more favorable impression upon the general, and without further delay marry him."

"There is very little happiness or prospects, as you call them, where *you* are, aunt," the girl replied, moodily. "I may as well tell you," she went on, "that I *have* made up my mind, and I intend not to change it, no matter what any one says, in regard to marrying General Ormsby. I detest him every day—yes, every hour of my life, and you know as well as you want to that I would be the most miserable being on earth if I yoked myself to him. You are quite right when you say there is a limit to all things. I am only human, and I refuse to talk about him after this, or even to allow him to enter my thoughts for an instant longer."

General Ormsby would soon die of grief, as her aunt had predicted, and there was a million of dollars to which she would fall heir if she married him before it was too late.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Miss Bitterwood's conviction concerning General Ormsby was indeed quite true. He seemed to shrink

from Lyle quite as much as he had once sought her presence.

In the silence of his own apartment he cried out to Heaven that it must certainly have been God's judgment upon him for neglecting his daughter and seeking to wed one scarcely more than Cora's age. It seemed to him that he must have been mad to even have contemplated such a step.

When Arthur Rollins had started out in search of Cora, his hope had been great; but as time brought no tidings of him, the old general settled down in an abject apathy terrible to see.

"They have both met the same fate," he would mutter over and over again.

One night the occupants of the cottage were startled by a hoarse cry coming from the direction of the general's room. When they gathered about him they found him shivering as one stricken with palsy.

"I have had a terrible dream!" he cried, "or rather, an apparition passed before my eyes. I saw Arthur and my darling in a little boat, surrounded by savages, and, oh, God! he shot my darling through the heart rather than that she should fall into the hands of the savages who were yelling like mad about them!"

From that moment on the old general refused to be comforted, and he began to fail rapidly.

"There is but one thing to be done," said the physician of the garrison to the commanding officers, "and that is to secure for General Ormsby a leave of absence to return home. He is not able, since his great trouble, to be on duty. He must be replaced by a younger man."

All his friends seemed to concur with this opinion.

When this information reached Miss Bitterwood's ears, she hurried at once to her niece's apartment.

"What I have predicted has happened at last!" she cried. "The general is to return East."

"Well?" said Lyle, looking up from the book she was reading.

"General Ormsby has concluded not to reopen his house. What, then, is to become of me, and yourself, for that matter, I ask?"

The girl started to her feet. Now that ruin stared her in the face, it brought her to a realization of what she had lost.

"He will surely take us back with him, aunt?" she queried. "You know he could not leave us here."

"When we reach the States again we will have to shift for ourselves. You had a cool million within your grasp, and you let it fly away from you like the down on a thistle. You deserve to be poor, and work hard. I shall have no pity for you."

Lyle's face had grown very white indeed.

"All is not lost yet, aunt," she said, hoarsely. "I will see General Ormsby myself and have a talk with him. He has asked me to marry him, and I will hold him to it. I will have his million, or I will know the reason why!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Miss Bitterwood, as she sprung toward the door.

"See General Ormsby at once," she replied.

Her aunt did not attempt to detain her. She might as well see him, she thought, and know the worst.

Lyle Warner flew quickly down the narrow stairway, and tapped lightly at the general's door.

In answer to his "Come in," she glided into the apartment.

He was sitting at the window in his arm-chair, gazing with his field-glass out upon the barren, trackless plain, just as he had sat each day, straining his eyes out over the grassy waste in the vain hope of seeing her who came not.

"Oh, general," cried Lyle, gliding up to him, and kneeling at the hassock at his feet, and burying her head upon his arm, "you do not know how it grieves me to see you sitting here so lonely! Do let me remain here beside you and try to cheer you up."

He shook his head slowly from side to side.

"I shall never feel cheery again," he moaned. "My only hope, my constant prayer, is to die, and be with my child up there."

"Oh, do not talk like that!" cried Lyle, wringing her hands. "Remember that you have *me* left to love and comfort you."

Again he shook his head.

"No, no, Lyle; that was all a mistake!" he cried. "Try and forget anything of that kind that may have been said between us."

She started to her feet and looked at him.

"You do not mean that, General Ormsby!" she panted. "After winning all my young heart's love, do you mean that you would cast me off after that fashion? It takes two people to make a bargain, and it takes two to break one!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

General Ormsby rose to his feet with great dignity, and slowly faced her.

"You forget yourself, Miss Warner," he said. "I hardly think that you can mean all that you are saying. It does not become a woman to insist upon marriage when it has become distasteful to the other party equally interested. I have been thinking the matter all over, as I told you, and I see that it would not be right for me to think of marrying you. I may have been a little hasty, but even so, it was the fault of the head, not the heart. I did not mean to cause you grief in any way. The time will come when you will look back to this scene and say: 'The old general was right. I thank Heaven that I did not make the sacrifice of becoming his bride.' You will in time meet some good, true young man who will easily make up the loss."

As Lyle saw all prospect of the Ormsby million fading from her grasp, she became frantic, almost wildly hysterical.

She had seen too much of life to go back to work *now*; she would win while yet there was a fighting chance of saving herself from poverty.

"Nothing that you can say changes my determination," she declared. "No man should ask a woman to marry him unless he intends to keep his promise, or to stand the chance of being made to do so."

"I can not believe you mean all you say," he repeated.

"You shall see," she declared.

"Miss Warner," he said, rising to the occasion, "I would not marry you now if you were the only woman in

the world, and if it were to save my life! Of all things on this earth, I abominate a mercenary person. I brought you out to Fort Hadley, and I will return you to your friends in the East. More than that you must not expect of me!"

"If I were to sue you, the law would give me the greater part of your fortune," she declared.

"We shall see," said the general, shaking his cane fiercely at her. "I will make a test case of this for the benefit of all elderly men who may be tempted to marry young women, and open their eyes to the fact that they are marrying them to spend their money. Go right ahead with your breach of promise suit, young woman. You will find old General Ormsby, who never shrunk from a battle yet, is ready to meet a foe upon any ground, and cross swords if need be."

Lyle saw that she had gone too far; but there was no way of retreating from what she had said.

"I wish you good luck with your lawsuit, young woman," he said, opening the door for her to pass out.

Miss Bitterwood, who was leaning breathlessly over the baluster, listening to the wrangle of words with a face white as a sheet, cried out to herself that all was lost.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Without another word, Lyle left the room, a strange glitter creeping into her dark, restless eyes. The excitement of that interview had left her dazed, and with a horror of what was coming stealing over her.

"I will be even with him!" she said, under her breath. "The craven, cowardly old man will grovel at my feet and beg for pardon, and he will be glad to let me make my own terms, or my name's not Lyle Warner!"

The very first person she met as she entered the hall was Miss Bitterwood, coming toward her with a face white as death. Instead of uttering the words which trembled on her lips, she motioned the girl into her apartment.

Lyle sunk into the nearest chair, her aunt locking the door nervously and dropping into a seat beside her, a frantic expression crossing her comely features.

"You saw him, and all is over between you?" she asked, suddenly, her nerves wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement.

"I will tell you all about it," Lyle answered, moodily, her flashing eyes telling their own story.

For nearly an hour they sat there together, talking over the strange turn affairs had taken, until Lyle had quite exhausted herself with her fierce upbraidings of the old general.

This was indeed a pretty state of affairs; but it must not, it *should* not end in this way, she told herself over and over again.

"Indeed you will *not* go away among strangers. You will stay just where you are, and become his bride!" declared Miss Bitterwood, vehemently. "Two against one will have some weight, I reckon, or I will know the reason why."

At that moment Miss Bitterwood entered General Ormsby's private office. He was seated in a chair by the table, and his face wore a dejected, yet quite deter-

mined, expression that boded no good for the errand upon which she had come.

"I beg your pardon, General Ormsby, for interrupting you," she said, summoning all her courage for the coming attack.

"Take a seat," he said, coolly. "You are just the person I wished to see. Pity you hadn't come here a little sooner; there was a mighty storm brewing about the place, and that Miss Warner was the cause of it all."

"Lyle—Miss Warner, the cause of it?" she panted, wildly. "Why, every one knows that the girl thinks so much of you. What on earth could you two have been talking about to cause such ill feelings as this, I wonder?"

"I should think it the strangest thing imaginable if anything of so serious a nature as that which transpired between the young lady and myself was not told you before now. In short, the young girl's friendship with me is at an end forever," said the general, bluntly.

As he said the words, Miss Bitterwood fell back in her chair, trembling, shrinking from him, as if he had dealt her a sudden blow.

"I—I thought you had too kind a heart, general," she said, with a touch of sadness in her voice, "to change your sentiments, and to turn your liking against a poor, friendless young girl, who has neither father, mother, nor brother to turn to in life's sad warfare, because of some unknown change that has come over you."

"Let us bury the hatchet and be friends as we once were," he said, cheerily. "Give me a chance of saying a few words in my own defense, and after that perhaps you will not judge me as harshly as you do now, and I am well assured that you would never think of being

as exacting as this girl, as unreasonable, is the word that would suit me better."

"Go on," she said, gazing at him attentively, wistfully, yet grieving in silence over his words.

She heard his deep, rich old voice saying earnestly:

"Miss Bitterwood, you and I have been old friends for a long time, and in all the years that you have known me, I am sure that you can never recall one instance wherein I have ever acted dishonorably toward any one. She, Miss Warner, has been trying to convince me against my better judgment that I am trifling with her feelings when I tell her that I do not desire to enter the state of matrimony with her, that we are entirely unsuited to each other. Feeling as I do about it, it would be entirely wrong to encourage such a thought for an instant, let alone to take such a step."

No one could have been more respectful in his simple arguings than he, she well knew, but she must talk for the girl's interest, and she answered in a more exacting tone:

"You did not tell her that these were your views when you first became acquainted with her. You led her to believe that she filled an aching void in your heart. You were always by her side; and she—we believed you wanted to marry her—if she continued to care for you at the expiration of a year, which is now up. Is this fair from one who professes to be honorable?" she asked, her noble face lighting up with a glow of wounded pride, remorse and fear for her niece's peril making sad commotion in her heart.

He understood that Lyle, orphaned and homeless, claimed all her protection and sympathy, and he felt that it was little more than useless to argue his cause

with Miss Bitterwood; yet he made one more effort to convince her that he was right in his decision.

"I was a fool to allow myself to be smitten by her charms and her girlish wiles, in the first place," he went on; "still, I had never felt a real thrill of love for her beyond that pity for her friendless young life that had never known the brightness and sunshine that a great many girls are surrounded with from the cradle to the grave."

General Ormsby rose and crossed the room to where she sat.

What a strange position for a man to be placed in, he thought—forced to love against his will!

"Miss Bitterwood, will you look up into my face a moment?" he asked, earnestly. "I have something more important to talk to you about than this foolish entanglement that you may thank Heaven I am well out of. What if I have a deeper and more sensible affection in my heart for an older person, a more sensible person, one nearer my own age? I have waited a long time before I made this decision. I have summered and wintered her who is better fitted to walk beside me in the remaining journey of my life. Do you not know who it is? Your face has been close to me all through the lonesome years of my life. You only would be a fitting life-companion for me."

"General Ormsby, do—can you mean it?" she gasped, scarcely believing that she had heard aright.

"Of course I do; and, what is more, this is the only declaration that has ever come from my heart since—since I wooed Cora's mother."

Miss Bitterwood dried her tears, and a crimson flush of happiness suffused her half-hidden features.

"But you and I know Lyle well enough to understand

that she will never in the world consent to such a change as this," she breathed, faintly. "We—we can be nothing to each other on that account."

"Yes, we can," said the general, reassuring her. "You would surely not give me up for *her* sake, would you, lovely one?"

For a moment there was silence between them. Miss Bitterwood was thanking Heaven for the cheer and companionship that had been sent to brighten her sad life. How strangely eventful her future was to be! she thought. How different from what she had ever imagined!

"Is it 'yes' or 'no'?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, faintly.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"I shall take you at your word, Miss Bitterwood," said the general. "You have promised to marry me, and I will see that there is no chance for *you* to back out;" this with a merry twinkle in his eye. A sudden thought came to him, and he made up his mind then and there that he would put it into execution at once. "How would it do to send for the chaplain of the regiment and have the knot tied here, and at once? At our time of life we are not so particular about having much fuss and ceremony; besides, since I have lost my idolized daughter, my heart is heavy, and I want everything quiet around me."

"It is so sudden, my—general," she said; "perhaps I

ought to go **away** a little while and get myself ready for—the marriage.”

“There is no time like the present,” he said, resolutely. “Don’t mind your looks in this case. A man never thinks of how a woman’s dressed when he makes up his mind upon a hasty wedding.”

So saying, he touched the servant’s bell, and in response to his summons an orderly tapped at his door.

“I want you to hunt the chaplain up, and tell him he must come here to my office without delay. See that no one else is allowed to disturb me,” were his orders.

The soldier set out at once to execute his orders, the general going to the veranda and gazing after him.

“What a sight I am,” thought Miss Bitterwood, ruefully, finding herself alone for an instant.

She brushed her hair back, with its dark, severe waves, smoothed her plain collar, rearranged the folds of her gray dress, made in its unpretentious style, and took a hasty look at her plain, radiant face, which the last rays of the setting sun were lighting up.

While she stood there, bewildered, wondering whether it could be reality or not, the door opened suddenly and General Ormsby entered, followed by the minister.

“I did not have to wait long for our old friend,” said the general. “There is no need for any preliminaries—you may as well proceed at once with the ceremony.”

Five minutes later, and he pronounced them man and wife.

General Ormsby clasped the hands of the plain, trusty woman in his own strong palms, and led her to a seat, taking a chair beside her.

“You must forget the old life of hardship you have

had," he said, gallantly. "We must live only for happiness and each other."

"I shall enjoy the future years immensely," she declared, smilingly.

"Come," said the general; "the parson has left us long ago. No doubt he has told half the people of the fort the news by this time. They will all be waiting for us—let us go to the little reception-room and prepare to receive them quietly."

"It will be quite an ordeal for me to meet them at present," she said, turning in the opposite direction. "I will go to my room and steady my nerves a little," she said, "and make myself presentable."

"I suppose you will have your own way, after the fashion of brides," he said, laughingly. "You will meet me at luncheon, and a few of our friends will be present to greet you. I hope they will not be kept waiting long."

Leaving the general to his own reflections, the newly made wife went hurriedly to her own room in search of Lyle.

How should she break the news to her? she wondered, anxiously.

Would not the girl rave, or perhaps do worse? In her desperation and ungovernable temper, she might even be tempted to take her young life in a fit of remorse.

Who could foretell how this strange marriage would end, after all? she pondered.

With a crimson flush upon her face, Mrs. Ormsby drew the girl hurriedly into her room, holding up a finger warningly to her.

"Hush!" she said, speaking scarcely above a whisper. "You must become more lady-like, and not speak your mind out as you have been doing in the past. I am de-

lighted with my interview with General Ormsby. I wish we had come to this understanding long ago, instead of our beating about the bush in the way we have been doing so long. Draw your chair up nearer, Lyle; there is no longer any use in my concealing the truth from you, and my heart tells me that you will rejoice with me, my dear niece, when you learn from my lips what has transpired."

"Is General Ormsby going to do handsomely by me, after all?" the girl asked, impatiently. "He had better, if he knows when he is well off!"

"Leave all that to me," interposed her aunt. "I will see that you are abundantly provided for—that you have everything you need, and, under the circumstances, you will be spared all the worry and bother of looking after the general; you will be just like a daughter to both——"

"But this part of it doesn't interest me one particle. 'Like a daughter!' What has that to do with my settlement? I thought you went down there to see him about my becoming his bride," she went on, fretfully; "if not, he was to make me over a competence for his backing out that would make me independent for life. I hope you didn't let him put you off like a simpleton by his saying he would regard me as a daughter always, or some light little sentiment of that kind, to bridge things over in his own way, and hoodwink *me*, because he found you were easily appeased. I suppose you even forgot yourself, and broke the sacred promise you made me, by telling him that you were my aunt!" this contemptuously.

She would not for the world have had any one suspect that she was in any way related to the poor, dependent old housekeeper.

"You will not give me a chance to get in a word edge-

ways," said that lady. "I hope, Lyle, when you know all, that we shall be as good friends as we were in our struggling past. Remember, my dear girl, that I have always done everything in my power for you, and that I always will. As long as I have a dollar, I will deny myself things to share all my prosperity with you. I would be very unhappy to have wealth and everything at my command, with this happiness I am now to share, without doing all I possibly can for you, and to help you get a man with the means of supporting you in good style some day."

"Why, what in the world are you talking about, Aunt Bitterwood? At the rate you are going on, one would certainly believe you had been taking leave of your senses, or that the old general had turned your head—which most any man could do!"

For answer, her aunt stepped lightly across the carpet and put both her arms around the impetuous young girl.

"I have been so fortunate, Lyle," she broke out; "I have some one to look after me during all the years to come, I hope. Nothing could have worked more to my satisfaction. Rejoice with me, my dear niece, when I tell you that General Ormsby and I are married!"

"Married? Do you pretend to tell me that that particular old General Ormsby, whom I tried my best to win, would marry *you*—a woman as old as the hills? Impossible! I would not believe it, unless I saw such a transaction with my own eyes."

"There was no one present except the minister; but you can easily find out the truth if you doubt me, Lyle. You can go with me and see the general, and learn from his own lips that a marriage ceremony has actually taken place between us. I did not tell him of the relationship

that exists between you and me, but did everything in my power to induce him to make *you* his bride; but all to no purpose."

"You have done the greatest wrong that could have been done a young girl in this wide world!" Lyle cried out. "You have ruined my prospects and cast me adrift because I trusted you and had no one else to advise me. You have led me to believe all along that I ought to marry General Ormsby for his money; that I should not set my mind on any other marriageable young man, and that if I did not carry out these plans, work and a future life of toil would be my portion. I listened to you, foolish girl that I was, only to be cruelly duped just when I most needed a home and means of subsistence. I have wasted a year and over of my precious life just when I might have found some one better suited to my liking, thinking it was right to obey you and abide by the choice you had made for me."

Her aunt tried to reason with her, clinging to the girl and whispering to her over and over again that she would plan for her, save every dollar that came to her, dress her in silks and diamonds, secure for her the handsomest, richest husband that was to be found; but Lyle answered her never a word, but stood looking at her with blazing eyes.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

But to return, dear reader, to Arthur and Cora, whom we left in the boat.

Arthur Rollins dared not think of the fate that was inevitable. The little skiff that Cora was trying with might and main to manage was heading rapidly in the very direction that led to the Indian village.

A little further and they would be directly in view of the terrible blood-thirsty Sioux, and both Cora and himself were by far too exhausted to pull the skiff out of the dangerous waters into which they were fast whirling.

"My God! what are we to do?" both cried simultaneously, looking into the blanched faces of each other.

Cora's tired, blistered little hands seemed to give out at last, and to refuse utterly to pull another stroke.

The strong current, which had become swifter and more tremendous in force, seemed to fairly whirl the little skiff, with its helpless, half-fainting occupants, along its treacherous channel—on, on, nearing the very shores of their merciless foes.

Arthur raised himself up, forgetful of his awful pain in the face of the danger that threatened them, and looked at the mad, wild waters; then seizing the oars, with a superhuman effort he gave a few mighty, dexterous strokes. Another moment, and he had checked the boat's progress, and had averted the imminent danger.

"Heaven be praised, we are saved!" breathed Cora. "God intended us to be beyond their reach."

Arthur's head was bent low on his breast; no sound came from his lips. Cora peered eagerly into his pale face.

Great Father! he was fast swooning away; the exertion had proved too much for him. Would they reach the shore in safety before one or both of them should perish? was her agonizing thought.

She realized that Arthur's senses were fast leaving him, that the superhuman effort he had put forth to stop the little skiff had proved too much for him.

Once again she summoned her remaining strength, reached for the oars, and pulled heroically along the new-found waters that meant freedom for Arthur and her.

She had no one to tell her if she was pursuing the right course. Every moment seemed an age to her as she plied the oars, the little boat rocking and tossing in its struggles with the relentless white breakers that seemed luring it on to destruction.

Off in the distance Cora thought she detected a line of trees. She strained her eyes, and putting forth every effort, propelled the skiff toward the far-off shore.

She felt that she was growing weaker; a sudden faintness seemed stealing over her. She reeled in her seat, and loosened her grasp upon the oars she had been plying; then a merciful unconsciousness stole over her senses, and she knew no more.

The night wore away and morning dawned, and Cora opened her eyes in a wild, picturesque little cabin.

As she looked around her in bewilderment, she heard a quick step by her side.

It was Minnewaska, who was bending over her.

"Oh, where am I?" she moaned. "Have they captured me and brought me back among the Indians?"

"Do not excite yourself, my lily," whispered the dusky maid. "You are safe here, and far beyond the reach of those you have made your escape from."

"Did any of the Indians overtake us?" she asked. "Where is my lo—Arthur—where have they taken him to?"

"Calm yourself, no ill has happened to him. He was almost lifeless, while you had swooned away by his side. I had a great fear after you two had left me that you might not find your way out of our grounds without being captured again. Jed, the young brave who carried me off on his shoulder when they had the fire-light dance, is always ready to serve me.

"Take me over to the darkest side of the wooded range; there the lily-faced captive and her lover are waiting to make their way out of our lands to their own far-off home, and to the poor, old father who awaits them," I asked him.

"We followed you, unknown to my people, through the woodlands and down to the river-bank, then we started homeward.

"Before I had gone half the distance, something told me to go back and watch over you, that there was danger ahead. Jed and I followed by the swift waters, and after pushing down stream and reconnoitering in different directions, I saw your little skiff, and I knew by the way it was heading against the stream that you were exhausted, and would soon become powerless to guide your bark in the right channel.

"I kept right on, heading in the same course, and finally you must have lost consciousness entirely, for I saluted you and no one answered my call.

"Jed did not waste a moment in trying to bring either

you or him to, but jumped into the boat and rowed with might and main to a place of safety once owned by a friendly fisherman. I followed with my own skiff, came here, tended to *him*, bound up his wounds, and you are both on the safe road to recovery."

"Oh, how good you are to me!" murmured Cora, tears coming to her eyes. "My father will reward you handsomely if you ever come to our fort; but do tell me, when are we to start for home? Is Arthur able to go? Every hour seems a year to me!"

"When your lover has recovered from his wound, then you can both return in safety," Minnewaska answered her. "Jed is taking care of him—he is the son of our medicine man—and he is getting better rapidly. To-morrow, at the noon hour, Jed will have a swift pony of his own, with soft skins for the young man to sit on, if he is able to go, and my pony will be all ready for you to go with him, so you see we have it all arranged."

"I am so glad you are with me, Minnewaska," said Cora, gratefully. "I am willing to do everything you may think best, and I know Arthur can never forget your kindness to us both. We will take the trip home to-morrow, if he is able, and my father will handsomely reward your heroism. He can not do enough for you if the time ever comes when it is in his power."

Minnewaska smiled, looked away dreamily, then hurried out of the room.

"I have brought you something to eat," she said, entering the room a little later. "Jed tells me that the young man is fast regaining his strength, and if you are ready to go to-morrow, you can both start on your journey."

"How very kind of you, my good girl," murmured

Cora over and over again; "it seems to me that daylight will *never* come."

Cora ate heartily of the appetizing food which had been prepared for her by Minnewaska.

At last came the dawn of that eventful day. Jed, who had gone off long before any one was astir, returned just as the dawn was breaking, bringing two fleet, sturdy ponies, with plenty of deer-skins to make the ride comfortable as could be expected.

"Get into the saddle, lady fair," said the Indian girl a few minutes later, "and I will help the young gentleman to mount—he is still weak, but seems very courageous."

Cora lost no time in complying with this order, and in a moment Arthur appeared, looking quite like his old self again, except for the pallor of his face, that still showed suffering.

They took a kindly leave of the dark-eyed girl who had proved so valuable a friend to them both, and following Minnewaska's directions, they put spurs to their horses and soon left the friendly woods and roof that had sheltered them far behind.

On, on, they rode toward the sloping hills and stretching valleys, their dark figures clearly outlined, with not a tree or a bush to break the monotony.

They had traveled miles since they had set out, not stopping for rest until their horses began to show unmistakable signs of being tired.

A new calamity seemed to threaten them. The animals would soon give out. They had several miles further to go in a circuitous route, as there were one or two Indian villages between them and their destination.

If by chance any Indians should meet them, neither

of them had taken the precaution to provide themselves with arms or ammunition.

There was a possibility of their being obliged to turn the animals adrift if they did not find a place of rest and concealment soon.

The situation was becoming more alarming, when 'Arthur's horse suddenly wheeled about in a mad, unrestrained fashion, and darted wildly in the direction of one of the Indian camps they were trying to avoid.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

It was a nine-days' wonder at Fort Hadley when the news of General Ormsby and Miss Bitterwood's marriage was circulated. The ladies of the garrison could think of, talk of nothing else; and yet they all agreed that it was better for both of them to marry, now that Cora was lost, or perhaps dead, to the idolizing father.

Early that same evening the ladies and their escorts reached the general's house in goodly numbers, to extend their congratulations to the newly wedded couple.

When they found themselves alone, the general said, wonderingly:

"It is a little surprising that Ly—Miss Warner did not conquer her chagrin, and drop in to pay us her respects as our other friends have done to-night."

He saw the color die out of her cheeks at the mention of Lyle's name, while the hand that lay lightly on his arm trembled.

"She will come later," she answered, confusedly. "I overheard one of the ladies that was here to-night say as much."

Before he could make a reply, a messenger came for the old commander, saying that his friend, Lawyer Ridgewood, was just starting for the East, and would like a personal interview for a few moments.

"He is just the man I want to see. Tell Lawyer Ridgewood I will be with him directly," was his answer. "Sit down and make yourself comfortable, my dear. I will be back in a short time," were his parting words as he took leave of his wife, and went in search of his friend.

His few minutes lapsed into one, then two hours ere he returned.

When she found herself alone, Mrs. Ormsby began to nod; a half hour later and she was fast asleep in her chair.

"I will not waken her," he thought; "she needs rest."

He went to an adjoining room, threw himself down on a sofa, and fell into a deep and troubled sleep.

The next morning, when they went in to awaken him, they found him cold and lifeless. A doctor was hastily summoned, who pronounced death from heart failure.

Once more the community of Fort Hadley was shocked at the tragic event that had followed on the heels of General Ormsby's marriage, and once again they assembled and laid him at rest.

In the intense excitement that prevailed, Mrs. Ormsby talked only of her own situation, and calmly waited for the will to be read. He had had his friend, Lawyer Ridgewood, make a new will the night preceding his

death, in which he left all his earthly possessions to his wife, Mrs. Ormsby.

Three days later, the general's widow made active preparations to depart for the East. Lyle, who had watched General Ormsby's proceedings with bitter rage in her heart, thought it would be better to fall in with her aunt's ideas, as she was now a widow of great wealth.

It was quite late the following morning when Lyle ate her breakfast. She had scarcely sat down ere shouts and cheers fell upon her ears. She started to her feet and joined the excited group of men who were making toward the entrance of the fort, where the commotion seemed to come from.

"It can't be true!" exclaimed Major Raymond's wife, rushing past the crowd in the direction of the gate.

"Most likely it is a strategy of the Sioux," said another.

Before they had time to conjecture what was amiss, an orderly came rushing past them like a whirlwind.

"Cora Ormsby, the general's daughter, has been found! She is at the gates!" he shouted.

Wild, hoarse cries of joy broke forth from every throat, as they ran swiftly to the gates to welcome her.

Far down the road they had heard the ring of her trusty steed's hoofs, then a cloud of dust floated away, and the bright morning beams poured down in radiance upon a form and face they knew full well—it was Cora Ormsby, whom they had given up for dead.

Wild shouts and screams of rejoicing filled the air; loving hands were uplifted to her, and they carried the girl, half delirious with joy and anxiety, safely in their arms, and stopped when they reached the nearest officer's house.

Before she had scarcely regained her breath, she told them of how Arthur Rollins had saved her, that they had made their escape together, and although he was suffering from a severe wound in his shoulder, he had brought her to within a few yards of the fort, returning a short distance to turn the horses homeward, having promised Minnewaska to do so.

The women smothered hapless Cora with kisses, while the men turned away to conceal the sorrow that they knew would follow when she learned how her home was broken up.

"My father, please tell him I am here! Quick! I can hardly wait to see him!" and she fairly sprang from her seat in the direction of the door.

"We were married a few days ago," said Mrs. Ormsby, stepping up to her, "and he died soon after. All that he had he left to *me*. You may come to my home later, if you wish," this in a cold, indifferent tone that struck a chill to the girl's aching heart.

Cora shrunk from her and hid her face in her hands. There had been no sudden cry of surprise, no hysterical outburst of violent weeping. The girl was like one dazed with the shadow of her heavy trials hovering over her.

There was a momentary hush among those who had gathered around the grief-stricken girl. When her sorrow had subsided in a measure, they bore her to the little sitting-room, where Julia Gordon awaited her.

A mutual attachment had sprung up between the two girls from that moment, and Cora found in her new friend a worthy champion for the trials that were to darken her near future.

Mrs. Ormsby lost no time in consoling the girl; but she fairly flew back to her house. She had left Lyle among

the eager crowd of women who were discussing the strange events that had just happened. She had barely had time to enter the little parlor when an imperative knock resounded at the door.

"Of course the women sympathize with the girl, and they have brought her back to her father's home," she thought; "but I will show them that *I* am running this place!"

So saying, she opened wide the door, and to her surprise Captain Lindsay entered.

"I came to have a talk with you, Mrs. Ormsby," he said. "I have waited until you were more settled in mind and perhaps reconciled to your loss."

"You are indeed very good to remember me at such a time," she murmured.

"Now that Cora, the general's daughter, is found," he began, unceremoniously, "you will of course share your roof with her, as well as return to her her rightful inheritance. It is quite lucky that you will have her as a companion, that you will not be left entirely alone."

"Do not distress yourself about my not being able to settle my affairs," she said, scornfully. "Ly—Miss Warner, I have asked to live with me as my companion, and one girl is plenty to share my roof."

"That depends *who* the young girl is," replied Lindsay, undaunted. "Don't you think you take enough interest in Miss Warner to be a near relative of hers?"

Mrs. Ormsby started.

"She is as near to me as if she were a relative."

"Come, now, my good lady, you might as well be candid with me on *this* subject: is not Miss Warner your daughter?"

"Who told you so?" she gasped; then, assuming an air of independence, and mentally concluding that the captain might make Lyle a good husband, she answered confidentially: "How funny it is that you should take such an interest in Miss Warner as to think that."

"I should really think you would be proud to own her," he replied, gallantly.

"So I am," she responded. "Yes, I will admit to you what I have never told mortal before—she is my daughter. Her father left me a year after I married him, and I was too proud to tell my friends this, so I concealed her identity. Thank you for thinking so highly of—of my daughter."

Captain Lindsay turned his head away; his thoughts were only of Cora Ormsby.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"Captain Lindsay, I have told you *all*," she said; "and may I hope in return that you will evince a deeper friendship for my poor, dear daughter than you did before you knew my sad story, which I pray you will never reveal to any one."

The captain did not answer her, as she had expected he would do, and her keen eyes could not help noticing the scornful smile that played around his mustached lips when she had asked for his friendship for her daughter.

"You have indeed been candid with me," he replied,

“and there may just as well be a mutual understanding between both of us here and now.”

Mrs. Ormsby's eyes lighted up with new interest. She bowed, and looked at him a little impatiently as he went on:

“Do not misjudge me, my dear madame, by thinking I have a deep friendship for your daughter, or that I could ever care for her more than to entertain that sense of respect and esteem which all women are entitled to. But there is one who is fair to me,” he said, “whom I love with all my strength. I would lay down my life for her, and serve her in a moment of danger at any cost in my power. You know very well who the girl is that holds my heart and soul. There is something on your part that could be done to help me, that would be of mutual advantage, believe me, to both of us.”

“Will you speak a little plainer, Captain Lindsay?” she said. “I do not quite understand you. I will be a friend to you if I can do you any good.”

“Madame, you are indeed kind,” he replied, the words falling slowly from his lips.

Despite his habitual self-command, his pale cheeks flushed each instant, and the light that sprung into his eyes revealed his thoughts clearer than he could have expressed them.

There was a moment's pause, and Mrs. Ormsby said, anxiously:

“I hope that you have not lost your heart, captain, to some spoiled and petted girl, who laughs at a man's affection when she has an army of rivals at her beck and call.”

“Certainly not,” said the captain, warmly espousing the cause of the girl he loved, believing he had a thor-

ough knowledge of the world—enough to know that she was innocent of such wiles as the lady had pictured. “Now, I have a surprise for you—a pleasant one, I hope; and, do you know, I have the greatest faith that you will help me win this fair girl as my wife if it is possible for you to do so.”

Mrs. Ormsby glanced at him covertly.

“I don’t mind telling you that the young girl who is all the world to me is Miss Cora Ormsby,” he said, proudly.

“You must not, you can not mean it!” gasped Mrs. Ormsby, realizing in a second what the situation meant to *her*. “Take care, and do not let your heart go out to her; it would be dangerous for your future happiness, as time will tell. You haven’t the least idea what a time her poor old father had in trying to control her. She’s a clever miss, full of ruses, willful, and she would become a terror for you instead of a blessing, as many another girl you might have chosen would prove.”

“You shall not speak of little Cora in that way, not in my presence!” responded Captain Lindsay, with asperity. “Come what may, refuse me, as perhaps she will, I shall not hear her maligned by man, woman, or child without resenting it to the bitter end. You have proved yourself woman in name only. In the first place, you have shown that you are devoid of pity toward this desolate young orphan. You have wronged her because you believed you had the power to do so, knowing that General Ormsby would never have cut his only child off penniless had he but known she were living.”

Mrs. Ormsby trembled from head to foot, her eyes grew restless and troubled, yet she dared not speak lest she should arouse his ire still further.

"Have you asked her to come and share the home her father left?" he demanded.

"Yes; I told her she might come here if she pleased to, but she seemed inclined to refuse my offer. What more could I do than that?"

"I desire you to go at once and make friends with Cora, and do everything in your power to help my suit along, and you will lose nothing by it."

"But suppose I refuse or fail, what then?"

"That would be the worst thing you could possibly do, for your *own* welfare. I would prove a dangerous man if I were foiled in my purpose, especially where my heart, my life itself, as you may say, is involved. It would mean ruin for you—a fitting revenge for the failure, I assure you, madam."

"Stay!" she called, as the captain was about to turn from her. "It will almost break my heart to consent to—to what you ask; but it is the wisest course. Let us come to an understanding about—about what settlement you will want for her. You promised to let me keep what the general bequeathed to me, if I would use my influence and do all in my power to bring you and Cora together?"

"Yes," he said, quickly. "Remember that I am in love with the girl for her own sake. She would be just as dear to me if she hadn't a dollar in this wide world. I have plenty for both of us, and I can afford to be very magnanimous to you if you will do everything in your power to help me win the girl—place no obstacles in the way. If Cora will consent to marry me, I promise you, here and now, that she shall never touch one penny of the money you speak of, with my knowledge, and I know I am quite able to influence my friends, let alone a wife, if I had one."

“Will you keep that promise—not to have her touch a dollar of what I have left me, if—if I help you win her?”

The woman’s quick, sharp glance seemed to penetrate his very soul, as if her life depended upon his answer.

“Yes,” he repeated, solemnly. “I will take a solemn oath to that effect.”

“I have something else to ask,” she said, excitedly. “Will you also promise me, Captain Lindsay, never to reveal to Lyle, or any other living person, that she is my daughter? She is so headstrong and impetuous that the revelation might terminate rashly with her. She must never know it! Will you promise me this?”

Again Captain Lindsay bound himself by another solemn oath to comply with her request, and thus the seeds of one of the bitterest tragedies were irrevocably sown.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

It was four o’clock—the clock on the mantel had just struck the hour—when the tall form of Captain Lindsay emerged from the Ormsby quarters.

“As, how happy I will be when I win Cora for my bride!” he murmured. “I don’t care what strategy shall be used; but, as I live, there was something forbidding about madam when, strangely enough, she consented to aid me. I suppose I am overfearful. If I could only pierce the veil that hides the future, I would not feel so oppressed.”

He turned back again to the door, where Mrs. Ormsby still stood looking in an opposite direction. He reached out his hand at parting, and said:

"I shall come in and see what success you have met with to-morrow at this time. You must not lose a moment in trying. I must see you again soon, and you must be able to tell me something in my favor."

"I will do my best, captain," she said, her eyes glowing with a strange light in them, her voice trembling with suppressed emotion.

Mrs. Ormsby locked the door of her room, and sat down to think over the strange chain of fate that was fast closing about her.

"It will not do!" she said, setting her teeth hard together. "He might mean what he said to-day, and change his mind to-morrow. If the general's daughter once became his bride, it would prove a stab for me—loss of fortune; and Lyle—her pride would be brought low into the dust."

Mrs. Ormsby watched the sun set over the sloping hills, then, hastily donning a long black mantle, a heavy veil concealing her face, she hurried quickly in the direction of a counselor's office. Half an hour later she left it, and returned home with blanched face and eyes swimming in tears.

"I have provided handsomely for my poor darling," she murmured. "The world may say that it is a foolish thing to die that we may leave all to others, but I say it is better so. Now we shall see who will get the Ormsby million. If they attempt to break the will that's just been made, my Lyle will fascinate judge and jurors—yes, she will win! I will die easy, even if it is by my own hand,

knowing that I have made *her* happy and independent for life."

She sat down and wrote page after page—the last she was ever to pen to Lyle, who had never given so much as one loving thought to her since her birth—directing her minutely, as only one skilled in legal lore could have done, praising her beauty, and urging her on to happiness and to her rights. Then she sealed the letter, and directing it to the girl, placed it on the table where it would be easily found.

She looked wistfully at the sealed envelope, thinking of the great power it would give her, and how different her own life had been.

Then she poured the contents of a small vial into a glass and drained its contents.

Slowly the white lids drooped over the heavy, sunken eyes, the pale lips twitched in mortal pain, and Mrs. Ormsby slept the sleep of death.

In the tasty little room which Julia Gorgon had fitted up for her girl friend, Cora Ormsby sat gazing wistfully out of the window two days after the tragedy.

The little figure was peering anxiously up and down the road, scanning each passer-by with an intensity that was pitiful to behold.

"Oh, why does he not come?" she cried, aloud. "My heart is surely breaking with the terrible suspense. What can it be that is detaining Arthur so long? They have captured him and taken him back. Perhaps they have killed him!"

"Oh, no, no! Please do not excite yourself so," answered Julia, throwing her arms soothingly about the little figure. "Your lover will come back to you safe and

sound. He may have lost his way—stopped somewhere to recover from his wound, and some fine day soon he will be walking in upon your retreat, handsome, noble, and as loving as ever.”

Just at that moment a prancing pony with a tall, fearless rider in the saddle dashed rapidly up the road and stopped at the cottage where Miss Gordon lived.

He dismounted and rapped sharply at the door.

Remembering that her companion had gone out, Cora answered the summons herself.

“It may be news from Arthur,” she thought, her heart beating wildly.

She drew back with a startled cry as her eyes suddenly met those of Captain Lindsay. He saw that she had no welcome for him; yet, nothing daunted, he stretched out his hand and clasped her own trembling one.

“Cora,” he cried, “why do you look so frightened? Are you displeased to see me?”

“No,” she answered. “I did not know who it was.”

The look of disappointment deepened in her blue eyes as she re-entered the little parlor, and he followed her in silence, with flushed face and flashing eyes.

“Cora,” he said, seating himself opposite her. “I am so sorry for you and all that has happened of late. I said to myself, ‘She has lost all that was near and dear to her; but she still has one friend who would lay down his life for her, though perhaps she does not know it.’”

He stopped short, seeing that Cora did not understand him, and gazed into those dreamy, wistful eyes that affected him so strangely.

His face flushed and paled. It seemed to him that Cora

must certainly read in every feature that he was in love—yes, madly in love with her.

“Please don’t feel so about my misfortunes,” she said, looking at him in alarm. “I am trying to live them down, but I don’t want any one to lay down a life for me; it would not be right.”

“Yes, it would,” he answered; “for *your* sake a man might give up all that he holds dear, if you would only give him one little word of recognition, or say that you would learn to think of him some future day.”

“I could not say *that*; it would be impossible,” said Cora, frankly. “I sincerely hope that no one will ask me to do that.”

“I will give you one week from to-day to think it over,” he said.

“My answer is the same now that it would be then,” declared the girl. “I can never marry you. If Arthur Rollins does not come back, I will be true to his memory—go down to the grave unwedded.”

This was the answer he was obliged to take away with him. But as he passed out of the house, he muttered to himself:

“Within a week’s time you will have changed your mind, my beauty. I know how to bring it about.”

CHAPTER XL.

When Cora Ormsby found herself alone she went back to her room, flung herself into her low rocker by the

window, too excited to think calmly what course she should pursue.

The hours that followed were wretched ones to her. All night long she did not sleep.

"Oh, God! send me some tidings of Arthur!" she murmured, brokenly. "What is there left for me now that *he* has gone?"

Even at that moment Captain Lindsay was carrying out a most diabolical plot that was to wreck two human lives and place poor little Cora at his mercy.

"I will gain her consent to marry me before another week," he repeated, as he left her presence after that unsatisfactory interview. "She loves that miserable Arthur Rollins, and I see that there is but one thing left for me to do in order to win my case, and that is to sow the seeds of distrust in her heart toward him."

And he fell to planning what was destined to prove a death-blow to poor, trusting little Cora Ormsby.

He set out early that same evening to a belt of woods where a party of hunters had camped out for several days past. They had left strewn upon the ground large patches of bark from the trees that had served to make fires for the campers-out.

"A capital idea! That's just what I've been looking for!" he exclaimed, as he carefully selected a broad, smooth piece of bark from among the remnants strewn around. "When I write a fictitious letter and tell her that another's love has taken her place, and sign the name of Rollins to it, woman-like, her love will turn to hatred for him, and I will console her, and win her for my bride at last. 'It's an ill wind that blows nobody good.'"

He wheeled around and started homeward, going at once to his room, where he found several old letters from

Rollins, which he cleverly made up his mind he could make use of now in imitating the handwriting.

It was near midnight ere he finished the cruel letter that was to sever two fond hearts most effectually.

The lines were faintly traced on the smooth piece of bark, which was the method of communication used by the more intelligent Sioux, and read as follows:

“ SIOUX CAMP.

“ FRIEND CORA.—I think it my duty to write you that there is no longer the love in my heart for you that once existed. I love Minnewaska as I never could have loved you. I trust you will find some one more worthy of you than I was. You are free now to choose whom you will. All is over between us. Forgive and forget.

“ Yours no longer,

“ ARTHUR ROLLINS.”

Twice Captain Lindsay read it over with very scrutinizing eyes; then, concluding that it was so like Arthur's handwriting that no one on earth could detect it, he carefully folded it in a bit of brown paper and directed it to Cora.

“ She will never know that Joe, the half-breed, met me the other day and told me of Minnewaska, and of her strange infatuation for young Rollins, which, luckily, I have been able to turn to good account in this instance. I'll not trust this letter in any other hands but my own. I will tell her it was sent into camp a moment before, and believing that it boded good tidings, I hastened to deliver it to her myself.”

Cora's face was pressed close to the window that same evening, as Captain Lindsay hurried up the path that led to the Gordon cottage.

"Ah! the scouts have been heard from at last; here is one of the messengers," she murmured, as she hurried quickly to the door, with a wistful, questioning expression on her sweet young face.

"Why, it is *you*, Captain Lindsay! Come in!" she said, repeating the words over and over again. "You have been successful? Tell me, did you find Arthur?"

"Yes, I have news from him," he faltered, following her into the little sitting-room and taking a seat opposite her. "A young warrior dashed up to the gates of the fort only a few moments ago and left this package for General Ormsby's daughter, saying it was from the young man who had brought her to Fort Hadley a few days ago. I took it hastily, and thinking it best not to trust it to a messenger, I came with it without an instant's delay."

"Oh, how very good of you, Captain Lindsay!" she said, laughing and half-sobbing for joy in the same breath.

Her little fingers tore nervously at the outer covering, and as she saw her name in the well-known handwriting, she said, excitedly:

"It's from Arthur! I knew he was safe. Heaven guarded him and heard my prayers!"

Hastily she scanned the bark with its faintly written lines—once, twice—then a wild cry broke from her lips.

She reeled forward, and would have fallen at the feet of the man who had so cruelly blasted all her hopes had not his strong arms upheld the swaying little figure.

"Oh, God!" she murmured, brokenly, "deserted, forsaken! I would have sooner doubted the constancy of heaven itself to me! Read what it says!" she moaned, pointing to the bark that had fallen to the floor.

He picked it up, and with well-feigned surprise in his eyes read it through in silence.

No tears came to her relief ; the blow was too deep, too vital.

"You must banish all thoughts of one so false from your life, now and forever, Cora, my poor girl!" he said in a low, soothing tone. "Think no more of him, but let the rascal see that you are not crushed. Let me guide and befriend you in your troubles. I love you so I can not bear to see you suffer. Live and be happy for *my* sake. You are all the world to me, little Cora!"

"I can not listen to you to-night, Captain Lindsay," she said. "I have passed through so much suffering within the last few minutes that I am not myself just now. I will put the past all from me, live to learn to forget the false, and commence life anew among my girlhood friends of the East. I was happy, oh, so happy! until I came out here. I have no one to live for, and my only wish is to go far away."

"Why do you say you have no one to live for, when my whole heart and soul is yours beyond recall, Cora? No other woman has ever won a word of praise, a sign, or the merest token of love from my lips save your own dear self. Do not spurn an honest heart that loves you because of one you found to be false and cowardly. Cora, when you turn from me, you will blot out all the sunshine from my life. Do not keep me in cruel suspense longer. Give me one word of encouragement. Promise me that some day you will be my wife, little Cora!"

To his surprise, she turned and placed her hand in his.

"Let it be as you wish," she said, indifferently. "It does not matter to me; nothing matters to me now."

CHAPTER XLI.

When Arthur Rollins left Cora, to take the horses back a short distance, as he had promised to do, he expected to return to Fort Hadley in at least half an hour.

But, alas! human calculations often fail.

He rode along joyfully, thinking how thankful he should be to know that Cora and himself were free. By this time his little love had reached the fort in safety, and he would join her in a few hours, at the furthest, he thought.

How weird and strange the wood looked as he hurried on his way? So lost was he in his blissful, happy reveries, that he never once noticed where the road diverged, until he came up beside a fire that smouldered redly, causing ruddy reflections to shine through the thick foliage.

He stopped short as he espied, but a few yards further on, a tent, from which at least a dozen dusky forms emerged.

His heart beat quickly, and his breath came in short gasps, as he realized the truth of the situation. He had taken the wrong path, and, great God! it was too late to retrace his steps. He had stumbled upon a party of warriors.

In a moment intense excitement prevailed among the dusky tribe, and with strange, savage cries they surrounded their helpless victim and tore him from the saddle, brandishing their heavy clubs over his head as he lay helpless on the ground.

There was one dark-browed warrior whose blighting glances fell upon young Rollins, and struck terror to his soul as he recognized him—it was Half-breed Joe.

His word was law among his swarthy followers. Instantly the recognition became mutual, and he cried out in quick, excited tones:

"Spare him a little—I have use for him just now. Through him I will find *her!*"

He turned to his despairing captive, swayed back the savage warriors with an imperative gesture, and bid him rise and follow him.

Arthur obeyed, and soon the two men found themselves alone within the tent and facing each other.

A half snarl fell from Joe's lips as he advanced toward him.

"So you made off with the pretty white lily that I had chosen for my bride when I should return," he said, fiercely. "I swore to be revenged upon you *then*," he continued, "and Half-breed Joe, as they call me, always keeps his word."

"I know that my life is in your hands," responded Arthur, huskily, "but I can tell you now, and forever, she will never be your bride. She is plighted to *me*, and no other man living can ever claim her as *his* wife!"

"I will see that you are bound with heavy thongs, and fare as prisoners do, seeing that you do not favor my plans," he said, menacingly. "Come, braves, tie this man securely; give him no mercy; feed him on small rations; there is trouble between us, and it will be war to the knife by and by!"

Quickly they sprung forward and obeyed him, binding his arms cruelly to the staples beside him, thrusting a bed of dry leaves at his feet, then, laughing at his misery, departed.

"Heaven forgive them, I never can!" he cried, with a

bitter groan. "No one will ever know what has become of me. They will starve me, and my bones will lie bleaching in the sun for many a day before Cora learns what my fate has been. The last word I utter will be her pure, sweet name. Thank God *she* is saved and safe among those who love her. Would that I could wake and find that this was but a horrible dream, that I have been looking into Cora's blue eyes and listening to her sweet voice instead of that fiend's."

He made a mighty effort to break the heavy thongs that were cutting into his swollen wrists; but it was useless; the heavy thongs seemed to cut their way deeper, racking him anew with torture, until he thought he would go mad.

CHAPTER XLII.

'Arthur Rollins made up his mind, as he lay there in that horrible position, that he must make his escape or he would die. He could endure his captivity no longer. With one mighty effort he wrenched himself free.

Oh, the unspeakable joy that came to him when he found that he was no longer bound in captivity! But how should he make his escape without being detected?

Every moment seemed an age to him. His thoughts were mingled with a feverish excitement of Cora and liberty.

The first faint streaks of daylight were stealing in through the aperture in the low tent. He went to the door of his prison. It was fastened with many thongs, which

he at last succeeded in tearing apart. Then he peered cautiously out, looked around him, and saw what his chances were for escape.

One, two dusky forms were moving about a few yards distant. It would never do to arouse their suspicions, he well knew; so he went back to the spot which he had just left and waited anxiously for the moccasined Indians to pass along.

He did not have to wait long, for just at that moment several dusky forms came up to where a lumbering wagon stood, and began piling in deer-skins and the spoils of their last hunting expedition.

An Indian lad came across the lawn, leading a spirited pony, which he soon hitched to the vehicle. Then he took a seat among the soft pile until all was ready for him to drive off, and pulling his thick cap down over his ears, he began to nod until he had lost himself in slumber.

Arthur watched the well-filled wagon from his place of concealment with his heart in his eyes. A sudden thought came to him, as daring as it was difficult, and he determined to put it into execution without an instant's delay, if it were in his power—and that was to take advantage of the boy's sleeping and crawl quickly under the huge pile of skins that they had arranged to send to the next reservation.

Watching his opportunity eagerly, Arthur Rollins found a moment when there was no one in sight, in which he crawled hastily into the wagon, the skins covering him from view most effectually.

Five minutes later the boy started on his way with his burden, and as he left the weather-beaten tents of the Sioux village behind him, jolted along slowly over the narrow, uneven road that led to a belt of forest, Arthur

rolled away the heavy load that enveloped him, and breathed a fervent prayer of thankfulness.

For an instant he sat bolt upright in the lumbering wagon, while the boy drove on further and further, leaving the village miles behind him.

Arthur had been revolving in his mind the quickest way to pilot himself to safety and Fort Hadley. The wagon moved altogether too slowly to suit him. They were apt at any moment to be overtaken by a band of roving hunters, while they were proceeding in the direction of another tribe of dusky warriors, who would take his life without an instant's hesitation if they discovered him. Every moment was precious to him now. He must make his escape at once, if he was to avoid greater dangers.

Suiting the action to the word, he leaped to the side of the wagon and jumped to the ground, calling loudly to the boy to stop. As the lad turned and saw him emerge from the wagon, he gave a quick, frightened scream, and flinging the reins down, he jumped to the ground and fell on his knees in helpless bewilderment, raising his trembling hands in mortal dread.

"It is a ghost!" the boy thought in alarm, "and he has been pursuing me ever since I left the village." With this belief he took to his heels, and turning his scared face in the opposite direction, started on a swift run, which he kept up until he was fairly exhausted.

In the meantime, Arthur Rollins made the most of the opportunity afforded him.

Quickly unharnessing the horse, he laid a fur robe over the animal's back, mounted it, and dashed away, taking the best paved road that he could find, plunging along at break-neck speed through tangled shrubbery, over rough

stones and boulders, with the thought of home and a glad meeting with Cora spurring on his every energy.

Oh for some sight to guide him to civilization!

He had guided the animal further away from the haunts of the Sioux, but at last he became puzzled, as he saw just ahead of him that the route ended in a steep path that led to the water's edge.

Which way should he go now? While he was thinking how he should proceed, he was startled by a noise in the underbrush, and turned around and looked in the direction from whence the sound came. To his great surprise he saw two stalwart Indians sitting on the bank before a fire; they were just finishing their meal, when one of them caught sight of the horse and rider scarcely a dozen yards distant.

With a mighty yell that resounded through the forest, they jumped to their feet and rushed wildly toward him.

Quick as a flash, Arthur Rollins jerked his horse's head, and with one mighty effort wheeled him around, lashing him on with might and main, and digging the spurs into his sides until he dashed madly into the stream.

Arthur Rollins was whirled by the topmost breaker and carried forcibly along, now sinking beneath the breast of some huge wave, now floating with the foam-tossed tide, without volition on his part, the helpless and unconscious prey of the waves. A long, dark speck suddenly appeared on the horizon, coming nearer and nearer to the floating figure and the stark-white face.

Presently it came abreast of the inanimate form, and with a great effort strong hands rescued him from the angry waves, and placed him on the barge of logs that was plying its way in the course he had intended to take.

After considerable effort, he was restored to con-

sciousness, though he was too weak and feeble to tell his kind rescuers who he was or his destination.

They were rough men, but kind of heart; and as they placed Arthur upon the rude bed they had improvised for him, he relapsed into a semi-conscious state again, while the rude barge carried him further and further away from the destination for which he had set out.

The barge upon which Arthur lay was owned by two men, who were traders, making long trips of hundreds of miles on each expedition without stopping.

They were bound for a Southern frontier village on this particular occasion, which was far removed from Fort Hadley, and they concluded, after a short consultation, that it would be best to take the young man with them who had been so strangely cast in their midst.

They did this out of the kindness of their hearts, little dreaming what was to accrue from it.

If they had aroused him, and asked him about it, his whole after life would have been different; but they thought it best to let him remain there until he should come out of his strange sleep of his own accord.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Arthur Rollins was awakened from his troubled sleep long hours after his miraculous rescue by the sound of excited voices near by.

"Where am I?" he asked in bewilderment, as he caught sight of the strangers bending over him.

"On a barge bound for a distant landing," responded one of the men, shortly.

"What do you say to joining us if you have no better place to go to?" asked the other.

"I am in a great hurry to reach the place where I came from," Arthur answered, eagerly. "I came from Fort Hadley a short time ago, and I am anxious to return there as soon as possible."

"From Fort Hadley?" both men echoed.

"Yes; I belong there," he answered.

"That is the place we both started from on this trip. We laid off there, and got pretty well acquainted with the folks at the fort. We had considerable trading to do with the settlers, and left there not three days ago."

"You left Fort Hadley only three days ago?" echoed Arthur, a world of eagerness in his voice. "Did you know General Ormsby, or—or his daughter? She arrived home safe, of course, did she not?" this with intense wistfulness.

"I will answer one question at a time, young man," he answered, slowly. "General Ormsby is dead."

"Dead?" broke in Arthur, starting up as if he had been dealt a sudden blow.

"Yes; and before he died he married an elderly lady who kept house for him; her name was Bitterwood, I heard them say, and *she* died too."

"Great God!" moaned Arthur, wildly, quite believing that he had lost his senses. "And who is Cora living with? The poor darling must be completely overcome with grief. I will pay you a good sum, men, if you will turn this boat back and land me at the nearest point to Fort Hadley. I must go to her at once. Oh, if I had

only known this before, if I had only been free to go to her!" his head falling sadly in his hands, his voice husky with emotion.

"Haven't you heard the news about the general's daughter?" the other queried, staring hard at the man's dejected face.

"What news?" he asked, with feverish impatience. "Be kind enough not to keep me an instant in suspense. Has—has anything happened to her?"

"Oh, no; it's a kind—er—romantic sort of affair. She is like all girls, I suppose. When they find themselves alone in the world, the next thing they have to think of is love and marriage. He's a handsome young man, and she fell straightway in love with him, and the upshot of the matter is they're preparing for a fine wedding, which is to come off soon."

"This is the first I have heard of it," Arthur answered in a low voice, a distressed look creeping into his heavy eyes. "I can not bear to think of Cora loving another."

"Why not? She was all alone in the world. Don't you like to hear about lovers?"

"I—I never thought of her marrying any one but me. Who—who is the man she is to wed?" he asked, suddenly, his eyes shining with suppressed excitement.

"If I remember his name aright, it is Captain Lindsay," was his reply. "She has put all her affairs in his hands, forgotten her sorrow, and, it appears to me, she will make as happy a bride as the sun ever shone upon."

"The last man in the world for that poor girl to have intrusted her future to—my hated rival, and one her father always disliked. It seems like a dream to me," he murmured, under his breath. "And to think she is

false to my memory, tired of me so soon, and I believed her as true as Heaven to me, and to the vows that I had supposed were so sacred and were to bring us such happiness. Ah! the bitterness of it! Better far had I been killed by the savages from whom I have just escaped than to have lived to learn of her heartlessness and perfidy—that another has taken my place before a week has separated us from each other!”

Suddenly the thought came to him that perhaps these men might know when the wedding was to take place. He had forgotten, in his excitement, to ask that most important question.

Two days later, they told him, and it seemed to him in that moment that the very life seemed parting from his body.

“Two days more!” Arthur gasped. “There is nothing I will not do or give you if you will only turn your barge in the direction that will be nearest for me to reach Fort Hadley. I *must* get there by that time, or I will blow out my brains, as there is nothing more left for me to live for! Can you turn this craft at once if I make it worth your while, my good men? If you but knew that a human life is at stake, in the name of a just God, you would return with me without a moment’s delay!”

“Impossible!” they both answered, simultaneously. “We would lose all we possessed in the world if we were not to push on as quickly as we can and get to the place we’re bound for.”

Arthur gave a groan of despair. The last hope was gone. He did not pursue the subject any longer, and they both wondered at his strange silence.

As the gray light of morning ushered in the dawn, one

of the men woke up, and started in the direction of 'Arthur's couch.

There was no response to his loud call, and his voice echoed out over the waters, startling his companion, who hastened to the spot.

"Where is he? He has gone?" they said to each other in shocked tones; then they instituted a search on the barge, only to find that he was missing, and had left no trace behind him.

CHAPTER XLIV.

But to return to Cora, dear reader. Now that she had given her promise to Captain Lindsay that she would be his bride, she would not falter, though it cost her the greatest effort of her life to look the future in the face.

To bind her promise more securely, Captain Lindsay lost no time in making their engagement known.

Cora received the congratulations of her friends in a very subdued manner, and more than one whispered to themselves that it was a most unhappy betrothal; but she was alone in the world, they argued, and it was much better for her to marry.

Deeply as the sorrow enshrouded her, Cora could not help but notice that day by day her friend, Julia Gordon, became more depressed. So she made up her mind to question her about it. Perhaps there was some secret sorrow gnawing at her friend's mind.

At first Julia denied everything; then she suddenly burst into tears.

"I may as well tell you the truth, Cora," she said. "The day that you marry Captain Lindsay, all happiness will be over for me. For, ah! how can I tell you?—I love him!"

"If that is the case, Julia, I shall never marry him," said Cora. "I would rather die than take any girl's lover from her!"

"It was not your fault!" sobbed Julia; "you did not know. I kept it from you."

"But I know it now," returned Cora, firmly.

"It is too late!" sobbed Julia.

"You should have trusted me with your secret before," said Cora, gently.

"What could it possibly avail?"

"You can not always tell. Had I known this, I should never have promised to become his wife; and now that I know it, I shall never be!"

"Would you make so great a sacrifice for me, Cora?"

"It is no sacrifice, Julia. I have long since regretted my promise to marry him. This shows me a way out of it."

"But Captain Lindsay, he would not release you."

"No man can force a girl to say 'yes' at the altar against her will," she answered; "and when I give you my word that I will not marry Captain Lindsay, nothing can make me change my mind. You can rest assured that I will not do so."

Julia caught her hands and kissed them with gratitude too great for words.

"You are indeed a noble friend," she murmured, ex-

citedly. "Words fail me in expressing to you what I feel."

"He trifled with my affections," said Julia, laying her head on Cora's shoulder. "He always sought me out when you were not about, and made professions of love to me. On one occasion he asked me to marry him, but the next evening he laughed me out of it, saying it could only be called a joke. What on earth could I say to that? Luckily, I had not even told my sister. Had I done so, I would have been shamed to death of the result. She would have called him to an account, and he would have backed out before the whole fort."

"No wonder, if that is the case, you feel badly. He must keep his word and marry you," declared Cora.

"You mean well enough, but you don't know what you say," sighed Julia.

"Any man who asks a girl to marry him should be held to it," said Cora, firmly, "even if she has to resort to strategy to cause him to keep his vow."

"That could not be," sighed Julia.

"Do you know how it could be done in this case?" asked Cora, throwing her arms about Julia, and looking eagerly into her face.

She shook her head disconsolately.

Cora bent forward and eagerly whispered a few words in her ear.

Those few words fairly made Julia gasp for breath.

"It—it could not be done," she murmured, faintly.

"Why not?" asked Cora.

"Because I—I would not have the courage."

"A woman has the courage to do anything to win the man she loves," said Cora.

"That is very true," said Julia. "I—I will try it."

"Spoken like your own brave self! With such courage you can not fail," said Cora.

A glad light broke over Julia Gordon's face.

"You are indeed my friend," she murmured. "I will make the attempt, and whatever comes of it— Well, I shall not anticipate anything ahead, but wait and see what comes. I tried to keep up, but, ah, Cora, my dear, I am greatly afraid I should have broken down at the last moment! You are my guardian angel!"

For an hour or more Cora and Julia Gordon held a whispered consultation, then the two girls retired to their room, but not to sleep. There was so much which required their attention, it was after midnight when at last they sought their couches.

CHAPTER XLV.

When the traders had refused Arthur Rollins' prayer, to land and put him ashore, he lost no more time in useless pleading. He had made a firm resolve in his own mind, which he only waited the opportunity to put into execution.

It was night. He stole on deck, looking long and eagerly down into the fathomless water that curled and eddied round the barge, leaving a path of foam behind it.

In the distance he saw a little tug, and cried out to himself that Heaven had answered his prayer. He waited

until the boat was nearly opposite him, then with one mad plunge he dived down into the waters.

He sunk—he rose, then with deathless energy he struck out for the passing tug, and with a force born of desperation, he grasped the little boat which was being towed by the tug.

He never knew how he clambered into it.

It took him long hours to recover himself sufficiently to call out to the men, who were at last moving about the deck. It was daylight by this time.

To Arthur's great joy, he found on ship-board one of the sutlers who belonged to Fort Hadley.

The recognition between them was mutual.

This man, Harris by name, had heard of Cora's loss, also that Arthur Rollins had started out in search of her; how she had returned to Fort Hadley without him, and last, but by no means least, of the marriage that was to be celebrated so soon; and to come upon Arthur Rollins so suddenly, surprised him.

He wondered if young Rollins knew of the approaching marriage of the late general's beautiful daughter, and that it was to take place that very day—ay, at high noon.

A few words showed him that the young man was painfully aware of the fact.

"I will do my best," said Harris. "I do not forget that you once helped me in a little affair, and it's a mighty poor rule that won't work both ways. Stay right here, and I will let you know in just no time at all."

It seemed to Arthur Rollins, as he paced the deck to and fro, that the man would never return. The moments, as they passed by, seemed to lapse into hours; he

did not even have his watch by him to tell him how the time was passing; the awful suspense seemed to take years off his life. When he could endure it no longer, he sought the engineer himself. He found the door securely locked. The sign of "No admittance," which glared at him grim, black, and weather-beaten, seemed to hold a horrible significance to him.

With one mighty effort, Arthur Rollins burst in the door.

"You must send this boat along!" he cried. "You are dealing with a desperate man! If fair means will not suffice, then I shall resort to other methods!"

Arthur sprung desperately toward the lever, and before either of them could divine his intention, he attempted to take the engineer's place, and to man the engine himself.

Harris was the first to recover his presence of mind.

"Come with me. You *must* leave here!" he said.

"Go from here—leave me at once!" said Arthur, hoarsely, fairly whirling him away from him; then before he could recover from his surprise, Arthur leaped to his side, and with one mighty stroke from his right arm, he hurled him out through the half-open door-way, shutting it with a heavy thud upon him, while the click of the heavy iron lock told Harris plainly enough that the door was fastened between him and the two men.

Meanwhile, the tug shot rapidly forward, like a seagull skimming over the water.

Harris realized that something must be done at once.

Again he tried the oaken door, but he found that it was merely a waste of time. He placed his lips to the key-hole and shouted desperately to Arthur:

"My God, you will blow up the boat! In another moment we will be lost! Open the door quick—in Heaven's name!"

A moment that seemed the length of eternity elapsed, and he heard footsteps from within slowly cross the floor.

The bolt was shot back, and Arthur Rollins, white as he would ever be in death stood before him.

But he did not pause an instant to contemplate him.

Like a flash, Harris sprung past him. He saw the engineer lying motionless upon the floor.

He could not stop to learn the difficulty just at that moment, but he sprung hurriedly to the engine, and reversed the lever in the nick of time to avoid a most terrible disaster.

"I don't care what you do now!" cried Arthur. "See, the flag of Fort Hadley is in sight, and I am just in time to avert the marriage! That three minutes' leeway meant life to me, Harris. Surely you understand my position. I—I have not hurt him. He interfered with me in my life-work. I had to silence him for the time being. Don't blame me. Hark! what noise is that I hear?"

"It is the booming of the cannon from Fort Hadley," said Harris, laying one hand on his arm. "You are too late, Arthur, my boy. Do not take it so hard. It could not be helped. You did all you could."

"Stop the tug!" yelled Arthur. "For the love of God, hasten!"

"Don't you see that the marriage is over? The benediction is to be pronounced as the cannon is fired. The

general's daughter is now the wife of Captain Lindsay. Do nothing rash, Arthur. What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."

CHAPTER XLVI.

Cora Ormsby was up with the sun the next morning. This was the beginning of what was known far and near as the day of her wedding with Captain Lindsay.

Early that very same morning the soldiers and officers of the fort, with their wives and sweethearts, had busied themselves in gathering flowers, and weaving them into bright-hued wreaths to decorate the chapel. When they had finished beautifying the little wooden edifice, they returned to the fort to get themselves ready for the gala occasion, which, with its military honors, was to be one of the most pompous ceremonies that had ever taken place at Fort Hadley.

Cora had scarcely time to realize what was going on, ere messengers began to arrive at the door of her dwelling. Julia answered the summonses, and soon the broad-leaved parlor table was loaded down with bright, dew-sprinkled flowers, garlands, and wreaths, with cards bearing the names of Captain Lindsay and other officers, with a line written under each name—"Best wishes," "Future happiness," etc.

These tributes made Cora grow sick at heart, and she turned away from the odorous offerings with a shudder

of disgust, and crept back to her room, more lonely and desolate than ever.

Her self-communings were cut short by the entrance of Julia Gordon, who tripped lightly over the threshold, her blue eyes bright as stars, her cheeks flushed, a radiant delight shining in her features.

"I don't suppose you have allowed yourself an hour's sleep, my dear little Cora," she said, coming up to her and patting the pale cheeks with her warm, soft hands. "Cora, you have made me so happy this day!" she whispered, joyously.

"Better say I owe *you* a debt which I can never in this world hope to repay, Julia," the girl answered, earnestly. "I suppose the task of dressing must be begun," added Cora. "We have no time to lose, and must help each other as well as we can."

"I have laid out the bride's and bride-maid's dresses, and everything is ready for us whenever you think it is time to commence dressing," Julia responded, quickly, the light in her eyes deepening, her heart beating faster and faster.

"I will trust you to arrange everything," replied Cora; "and I know the marriage will go off as smoothly as can be, and somebody's heart, at least, will be ever so happy."

CHAPTER XLVII.

'At the appointed time, Captain Lindsay was in the little parlor of Miss Gordon's house, pacing up and down the room in the utmost impatience.

He was expecting Cora and her bride-maid down every moment. It was growing darker each second—the very light of heaven seemed blotted out from view.

He had never been sure that he would win her. He was in dread every hour—yes, every moment—of his life that something should occur that would prevent Cora from marrying him.

He had wrung the promise from her lips when she had believed her lover false to her, but she had not given her heart to him; it belonged to another, although she had pledged herself to wed his rival in a short time.

“I wonder if Cora will fail me?” he asked himself over again; and, unable to restrain his impatience any longer, he went to the staircase and listened, and he felt relieved as he caught the sound of girlish voices and soft, rippling laughter coming from the rooms overhead.

At last the murmur of voices ceased. Noiselessly they crept down the stairs and walked into the little parlor, and stood silently in waiting.

Captain Lindsay walked hurriedly toward them, murmuring over and over again:

“I am so glad you have come, my darling bride to be! It is growing so dark we can hardly see each other. Take my arm, little Cora, love.”

A white-robed figure stepped forward and glided to his side. The dainty dimpled face was not discernible behind the veil of fleecy white that enveloped her fair head.

Captain Lindsay led the veiled figure up the aisle, quite believing himself the happiest lover in the whole world. The minister took his place in the chancel,

opened his prayer-book, and the little group took their positions beside the flower-wreathed railing. A momentary hush filled the room; every eye was bent intently upon the wedding party.

The organ, which had pealed forth the sweet strains of a wedding-march, ceased, and the minister commenced the solemn service.

The bridegroom's responses were clear and earnest, the bride's so faint that they could scarcely catch the whispered words that fell from her lips. Another instant and he pronounced them man and wife.

Captain Lindsay leaned forward smilingly as she swept the folds of her bridal-veil aside with her graceful white hand.

As he looked, he drew back with a startled cry that echoed strangely through the old chapel. Like one fascinated, he gazed into the half-frightened face that looked into his. It was Julia Gordon whom he had wedded, and not Cora Ormsby! And at the same moment the booming of the cannons was heard without, their deafening sounds resounding far and near.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Captain Lindsay gazed into the face looking up into his own like one aroused from a horrible dream.

He saw through it all now. The girl standing at his side had taken Cora Ormsby's place, and he had made her his wife. These two girls had laid this daring plot

together to outwit him, which they had succeeded in doing most cleverly.

Captain Lindsay's face would never be whiter in death than it was at that instant. It was distorted with passion, too.

Immediately the fierce wrath in his nature was stirred to its utmost as it flashed across him how he had been victimized by Cora and Julia Gordon.

A swift change seemed to come over the girl who stood so silently by his side, which puzzled him despite his intense anger. Whiter and whiter she grew, while the light in her eyes blazed feverishly in their depths.

He turned his head and looked beyond her. Where was the bride-maid, whom he knew now must have been Cora? She was nowhere to be seen; no one had noticed the pale-faced girl, in the intense excitement that prevailed, as she glided noiselessly, like a wraith, down the crowded aisle among the panic-stricken crowd.

When she reached the hall door she paused an instant, and threw a long gray cloak about her which she had left there. Then she sped with lightning-like rapidity along the dusty, winding road by which she had come but a short time before on her strange mission.

One thought only was uppermost in Cora's mind as she sped swiftly in the direction of the Gordon cottage, and that was, to collect a small parcel of her belongings, don a dark robe, and to start straightway off—anywhere, she knew not, cared not, so long as it was away from the fort.

All this time poor Julia, who had thoughtlessly deceived handsome Captain Lindsay into that strange marriage, remained unconscious of what was transpiring around her.

A guilty pang of deep remorse had shot through her heart when she saw the sudden change from indifference to hatred which her newly wedded husband showed for her.

A wild excitement took possession of her when she heard him hurl fierce maledictions and direful threats at her, showing no signs of relenting, granting her no mercy.

She reached out her hands imploringly to him, uttering pitiful, broken cries, and falling down on her knees lowly, beseechingly before him.

She might as well have knelt before a statue.

"You are still acting a clever part," he hissed, in a hard, unnatural voice; "but it is my turn now to see that justice is done, and that you meet your just reward, woman! You shall suffer more than you have made me suffer! There is no punishment that will be too great for you to bear.

"You knew all the love in my heart was given to another, yet you forced yourself into a marriage with me. How dared you deal me such a blow? Any one else but me would have crushed your false life out. How came you to risk my anger?"

"You are so cruel to me that it is a wonder God does not strike you dead!" she moaned. "No matter how much I plead my great love for you, you turn a deaf ear. You love *her* best. You taught me to love you once, and this is what it has cost you."

CHAPTER XLIX.

Who shall picture the feelings of Arthur Rollins, as he sprung from the gang-plank and rushed madly up the narrow path that led to the fort? He found the people in the fort in the greatest of excitement.

What did it mean—the white, scared faces and the terror in the eyes of the women and children?

While he paused a moment for breath, he heard the whole story of the marriage—how it had turned out that the two girls had changed places at the very altar; that it was Julia Gordon who had wedded Captain Lindsay, and his terrible rage when he discovered how he had been duped, and of Cora's sudden flight.

As he listened in breathless amazement, quick as a flash the thought came to him that all the trouble he had undergone had been at the instigation of Captain Lindsay.

It had been done to separate him from Cora.

He could have cried aloud in thankfulness—in joy to Heaven—that Cora was not wedded to his rival.

Where could she have gone? Life must have been unendurable to her to have fled from the people at the fort.

There was no tie that bound her, now that the old general had passed away. But where could she have gone? His judgment told him that she must have gone back to the East; there was no other place toward which she could have turned her steps.

He made up his mind to follow her at once.

He took one of the ponies picketed close at hand, and stole away.

He well knew that if he should rush to headquarters and apply for leave of absence to Captain Lindsay, his superior officer, that he would be refused, as he dared not stand the chance of being refused. He well knew that he would be shot down on sight, as a deserter, if they were to find him. Even for all that, he must take his chances, come what might, with one hope, that of finding Cora, to buoy him up.

A day and a night he traveled incessantly. He had heard from a trapper whom he met that the stage-coach on the overland route had passed that point but a short time before, and that among the passengers he had noticed a young and very beautiful girl, whose hair was as golden as the sunshine and whose eyes were as blue as forget-me-nots.

"It is she!" he muttered to himself.

"I could not help but notice her," continued the trapper; "for the young man who was with her paid her such devoted attention."

"The young man who was with her?" he gasped. "Are you sure you have not made a mistake?"

The trapper shook his head.

"I was in love once myself," he answered, "when I was young, and I have a tender place in my heart for lovers. I could not help but watch the young fellow, he seemed so very fond of the girl beside him."

Arthur's hands fell nervously to his side.

"Was he an officer, or one of the soldiers of the fort?" he inquired, breathlessly.

"He was dressed in citizen's clothes, but he had a very superior way with him. I think, perhaps, he might have been an officer—a captain, or something like that."

Arthur paused. If this was the case, should he pur-

sue Cora any further? She was going to the far East with never a thought of leaving him behind. If he should pursue her and overtake her, what should he say if he found her with some lover by her side?

There was but one thing to do, and that was to push onward. He dared not return; he had burned his bridges behind him. He had lost heart and hope. There was nothing now to look forward to but escape.

It hurt him to be known as a deserter; but there was no help for it under the circumstances. They could court-martial him, put him to death, if they liked, for an offense of that kind. Yes, he must go on.

It was with a very sore heart that Arthur Rollins pursued his way. Another day and he was within some fifty miles of the stage-coach.

Once more he turned his horse in the direction of the main road. It was night by this time, and, tired out with the journey of the day, he sought rest for a little while in the cool shadow of the trees.

Tethering his horse to a stake, he threw himself down in the long green grass. He did not mean to lose himself in sleep, for time was precious to him if he would overtake the stage-coach. An hour would give him all the rest he needed.

He had scarcely flung himself down under the trees ere he heard the sound of the tramping of horses' feet. It was a welcome sound to Arthur, for companionship in the vast wilderness would be a boon.

He was about to call out, when the sentence that fell upon his ears held him spell-bound.

"How far do you think the stage-coach has got by this time?" said a gruff voice.

"Not more than twenty-five miles or so," returned his companion.

Whereupon three or four more voices broke in, so that Arthur judged there must at least be half a dozen men in the party.

"It will be a pretty rich haul!" exclaimed the first speaker, with a chuckle. "I have had a good description of the people it is carrying, and we shall have an easy time surrounding it and getting whatever valuables there may be in the crowd. I'll divide up evenly with you, boys, in all save sharing the pretty blue-eyed girl. If she is a little beauty, like what they've all described her, I shall want her for myself. She might do worse than become a bandit's bride, eh, boys? It will be very easy to abduct her, and there will be no one to tell what has become of her, and she will soon be forgotten. Of course, she is not traveling alone; but whoever is with her, we'll settle his hash very quick. We may as well rest here until daylight; we've been on this trail for two days now. To-morrow we'll see fun, as they say this is the richest load that the stage-coach has carried for many a day. Three or four of the passengers carry belts of gold about them. It is always best to attack a stage-coach at night; we have a better chance of escaping to the woods. We will travel all day and overtake it in the mountain-pass. We shall have them literally at our mercy there."

They arranged their plan of attack minutely, little dreaming of the terrified ears into which they were pouring their terrible secret.

Having discussed the matter at length, the men stretched themselves upon the ground, and they soon fell into a deep sleep.

Arthur had crept as close to them as he dared. He was afraid that the loud beating of his heart must be heard by them.

There was but one thing for him to do—to mount his horse with all haste, tired though the animal was, overtake the stage-coach, inform the passengers of what he had heard, and warn them of the peril which was awaiting them.

But how could he reach his horse? The stake to which he was securely tethered was on the other side of the sleeping men. Perhaps they had left one of their number acting as sentinel; the road-agents, as they called themselves, usually took that precaution. He could easily slip away on foot; but without a horse he could never expect to cover the distance before day-break.

He must have his horse—or, better still, one of theirs. They had said that their animals were fresh. He could readily believe that from the way they pawed the ground and pranced about impatiently. Yes, one of their horses would be best, if he could secure it.

Fortune favored him. Just as he was wondering how he could best secure one of their steeds, a horse broke away. He heard a muttered curse from one of the men.

“That devilish horse is loose again! He won’t go far. Let him canter round to his heart’s content; I’ll not get up and chase round after him, I’ll warrant!”

The horse careened around so wildly that in a moment’s time every one was awake, much to Arthur’s terror.

But they were a lazy set, these bandits. Each one made up his mind that it was the other’s place to get the horse.

After considerable quarreling and bickering, they all settled down to sleep again, and Arthur breathed more freely.

He waited some few moments longer to assure himself that they were all thoroughly asleep again, then he stole silently forth to the spot where the horse was grazing. If the animal made a fuss at his approach, all would be lost. He dared not speak to the horse to assure him as he approached. It was a moment fraught with such terrible danger that even Arthur's face blanched. If the horse betrayed his presence, all was indeed lost. He could only breathe a silent prayer to Heaven as he cautiously approached.

Nearer, nearer he went. Would the animal betray him?

Trembling like an aspen leaf, he stretched out his hand toward the horse.

Another instant of suspense. Would he turn from him and plunge into the deep wood, or would he remain docile?

He tried to whisper a word, but no sound fell from his lips. The horse raised his head, and with one bound plunged into the forest with a loud neigh of alarm.

CHAPTER L.

For a moment Arthur Rollins' blood stood still in his veins; he felt that he was discovered by the road agents.

To his great surprise, not one of them stirred. If they heard the animal they must surely have thought that

he was simply careering about in play at finding himself free.

Arthur resolved upon a bold step; he must have the horse. There was but one way, and that was to go after him, follow him into the thicket, and capture him.

Suiting the action to the thought, he stole cautiously forward through the interlacing trees. Twice he was so near the animal that his outstretched hand almost grasped the bridle, and as often the horse eluded him.

Desperate at the loss of time, Arthur dashed forward and made a lunge for the horse, catching him firmly by the mane. At first the animal began to rear, as if expecting a beating, but when he patted him on the neck and whispered a few low, soothing words, he became docile enough. With cautious steps he led him to the clearing. The road agents had not taken their saddles from their horses, and he was thankful for that.

Vaulting into the saddle, and giving the animal a sharp cut with the switch he carried, he was off like an arrow from a bow. He would have to take his chances upon their hearing the galloping roofs, he told himself, with white set lips.

As he struck across the sandy plain he discovered that the horse wore no shoes, his hoofs making little or no sound on the soft earth.

Mile after mile he traveled until the horse began to show signs of exhaustion, and yet he was some ten miles from the stage-coach.

He had no ammunition with him; he did not even have a revolver with which to protect himself.

His only safety lay in reaching the stage-coach at all hazards. The sun rose; it had climbed an hour high in the heavens. Ever and anon he glanced backward. He

could see for miles over the plains. There was no human being in sight; and not even a bird's wing swept the horizon. But as he watched, suddenly he became aware of a cloud of dust in the distance. He knew full well what it foretold—the road agents were close upon the trail.

The horse was beginning to lag so painfully, that Arthur told himself he could make quicker time on foot. His heart ached with compassion for the poor beast who had served him so nobly.

Very quietly he dismounted, and throwing off the bridle, set him free, and bounded along over the sandy waste on foot.

He was an expert athlete. The first mile he made with great ease and rapidity; but by the time he had gained half of the second mile, the driver of the stage-coach ahead seemed to whip up his horses.

In vain he waved his handkerchief and shouted to attract attention; his voice could not penetrate the distance; with the increased speed of the stage-coach, his exhausted condition was beginning to tell upon him.

To his intense surprise, the horse which he had abandoned soon came galloping up to him; the few moments' rest seemed to have worked wonders.

Arthur welcomed him with a cry of delight, and sprung upon his back. Another mile, and just as the horse reeled under him, Arthur came alongside of the stage-coach.

His suspicions were quite correct; the road agents had discovered their loss at day-break, and with a volley of oaths, had set about to look for the missing horse.

Then they came across the animal, tethered to a tree, which Arthur had ridden from Fort Hadley.

They knew the animal at once. An exclamation of surprise broke from their lips, and many conjectures as to where the rider could be were indulged in.

Each one agreed to the fact that the man from Fort Hadley, whoever he might be, had encamped in the belt of woods in which they had taken refuge the night before, had heard all their plans, and had gone ahead to alarm the occupants of the stage-coach.

Imprecations loud and deep fell from every lip.

With one accord, they agreed that the only thing to do was to follow in hot pursuit; time was everything to them.

They soon discovered the footprints, and a yell of rage followed.

"It is as we thought," declared the ringleader; "the man has made straight for the stage-coach route!"

As soon as they reached the level plain, one of the road agents produced a spy-glass, and raised it to his eyes.

"Aha!" he cried, "we were quite right in our surmise, boys! There he is, galloping off on our horse Toby, for all he's worth!"

Half a dozen rifles were brought into position for firing at once.

"No; save your ammunition, boys; you'll need it a little later," returned the ringleader, turning to his men. "He's riding my horse Toby, and I don't want it shot down, otherwise we'd riddle him with bullets!"

Fortune favored Arthur. For a few moments' time, while the road agents were holding this conversation, they could see that he was slowly but surely distancing them.

"He has seen us!" exclaimed one.

"I have an idea," interposed the leader. "It will not be wise for us to attack the stage-coach to-day. We will wait two or three days, follow it, and make the attack later. It will be just the same to us whether we strike them at the mountain-pass, or whether we wait until they reach the other side, and surround them in the forest after nightfall."

To this course of procedure they unanimously agreed.

Drawing rein beneath a clump of trees, they dismounted, grimly watching the stage-coach as it lumbered up the steep incline.

CHAPTER LI.

Arthur Rollins struggled on, urging the lagging steed forward, until panting and stumbling in the roadside, he found that he could go no further.

The time had come at last when he would have to pursue the remainder of his journey alone. Brave though he was, he felt himself in no condition to go the distance on foot; yet, panting with fatigue, he released the horse and pressed onward, nerving himself to face death, if need be, for Cora's sweet sake.

"My only hope, my inward prayer, is to reach my darling in time to save her," he muttered to himself, redoubling his efforts. "It is no matter what becomes of me after that."

Heaven must have aided the almost frantic lover in

his superhuman efforts to save Cora, whom he loved so fondly.

Slowly and patiently he toiled along, trembling with anxiety and weakness.

The long suspended color drifted back to his white face as he saw, just beyond the turn in the road, the lumbering, commodious stage-coach, which had come to a standstill scarcely a dozen rods ahead.

He turned into a barren field and cut across it, his lagging steps clearing the winding stretch of country.

As he passed the fork of the road his strength gave out. He could go no further. A mighty cry broke from his swollen purple lips. He threw up his hands, reeled, then fell like one dead in his tracks.

The road near by was filled with dust, and when the dense clouds had cleared away some one within the vehicle, who had heard his cry, discovered him and told the others.

Several of the passengers quickly descended and started to his assistance. They found the handsome, desperate face of the traveler white and haggard from long exposure. One man had a flask of brandy in his breast-pocket. This was used freely in restoring him to consciousness. After a short time their labor and patience were rewarded. The light of reason began to return to him. He opened his eyes and looked at those bending over him, murmuring to them to help him to rise.

They raised him to his feet and half carried him to the stage-coach near by, urging him to take a little needed rest before attempting to talk with them. And as they arranged outside a soft seat of fur skins for him, they little knew how much they owed to this young man's unwearied patience.

When he had recovered sufficiently he leaned forward and gathered the people around him, saying:

"I am glad it has turned out so well. I have been able to save you, thank God!"

"You are a stranger in our midst; kindly speak a little plainer so that we may understand you," answered one of the party.

"If I had not got here as soon as I have you would all have perished," he said, faintly.

A sudden fear blanched the men's cheeks, and they closed about him eagerly, plying him with questions which were not unmingled with suspicion.

"I am exhausted, but I will tell you what brought me here, my fellow-men," he went on, hoarsely, interestedly. "I must first go back to when this stage-coach left the fort. I arrived at that place in search of friends I had left, a few hours after your departure, secured a horse, and set out to overtake you, and to take passage on the coach, if possible. But my horse gave out, and darkness overtook me, forcing me to rest under shelter of the wood until dawn.

"As I lay there I heard the approach of a number of men with their horses, and I knew that they were intending to camp very near the place I had chosen to pass the night.

"At first I determined to mingle with them and tide over a tedious hour or two, but as they broke into conversation I listened, first in surprise, and afterward in horror, knowing full well that they were unaware of my presence.

"They unfolded one of the most diabolical plots to wreck the lives of human beings that it has ever been my lot to hear."

The men looked from one to the other, fairly holding their breath, while the women, who had remained in the coach, which was a few yards off, wondered at the little group, and still more so at the deep anxiety that was unmistakably depicted upon their half-averted faces.

"I soon found out that they were an organized band of plunderers, calling themselves 'road agents.' I learned that they were on the trail of this stage-coach, which they believed was carrying a large number of valuable express packages; that they were bent upon plunder, and even the taking of life, they declared, should not hinder their wicked purpose.

They listened like men who were dumbfounded; then, realizing the awful danger from which he had saved them, they grasped his hands and wrung them in grateful acknowledgment too deep for words.

"How can we ever hope to repay you?" one of them found voice to say. "We owe our lives to you. Let us all enter the coach, and rejoice that you have saved us."

"Not now," interposed Arthur, firmly. "We have no time to lose. At any hour they may be upon us, and attack the coach. We must act, men, before it is too late. Marshal your forces and get ready your arms and ammunition. Each man must be brave of heart for the sake of yonder loved ones, whose lives and honor are now in our hands!"

Arthur Rollins' commanding voice rang out eloquently, moving his hearers to prompt action. Guns, pistols, and sabers were soon put in readiness, while with one accord the men besought Arthur to be their leader in the impending conflict.

Arthur did not enter the coach, but hurriedly arranged every precaution for defense, first stationing guards at

all points where a raid would be imminent ; next burning the long grass for a considerable distance around the stage-coach ; then he unchained the dogs, that would scent the enemy afar off ; and, last of all, he sent one of the party to warn the helpless women of the danger that threatened them.

Darker about them grew the shadows of night ; not a star was visible in the heavens, while a stillness which seemed to bode evil hovered round the anxious watchers.

Arthur's suspicions were well founded ; for scarcely had the midnight hour passed when the sound of horses' hoofs filled the air.

Instantly the alarm was given, and the little band of defenders clutched their weapons and stood ready to face death unflinchingly.

On came the road agents, making no effort to conceal themselves, until at last they were in full view of the passengers.

" Lay down your arms and surrender, or die ! " shouted the robbers, fiercely.

" Never ! " came the defiant cry from a dozen sturdy throats.

Then commenced one of the most fearful scenes of carnage that field had ever known. The air was filled with bullets and smoke, mingled with the groans of the fallen bandits, and the cries of a few of the coach passengers who were wounded, but not seriously enough to prevent their doing their duty.

Arthur Rollins was in the thickest of the fight. The ammunition of his party seemed to be giving out at last. What would become of them in that event ?

Suddenly, in the midst of this new fear, a half dozen

trappers rushed to their aid. They had heard the firing, and had hastened to their assistance.

Another horror awaited the brave little band, however. Several of the foremost bandits threw their lighted torches upon the canvas-covered stage-coach, and a mighty blaze started up which threatened to destroy it, with all it contained!

CHAPTER LII.

In a moment the wildest and most intense excitement prevailed. The lighted torches caught at the varnished top of the stage-coach, in an instant of time it had ignited, and the terrified occupants found themselves bound in by a wall of living flame.

They were paralyzed with horror, and seemed incapable of action.

Suddenly through the blinding fire a man's form appeared, seized Cora quickly in his arms, and darted through the smoke again. A moment later the rescuers had succeeded in tearing off the top of the vehicle, and the occupants were saved. Strong arms quickly cleared the fragments of fire, scattering them right and left, Arthur superintending the work. In ten minutes' time all danger was over. The fire had been extinguished, the road agents had been vanquished.

By this time the two ladies remaining in the wagon began to call for Cora.

"Is she not here?" asked Arthur Rollins, looking blankly at the lady inquiring for her.

"You took her out of the coach," said the lady.

"I?" cried Arthur, in bewilderment; "why, what can you mean?"

"In the excitement, when the flames were thickest, did you not rush in through the smoke and fire, grasp her in your arms, and bear her off to safety?"

"No!" he cried in a voice of anguish; adding in a tone that was hardly human: "One of the road agents must have abducted her!"

The cry went from lip to lip; every face paled.

"Quick—to horse!" cried Arthur. "We must overtake them! We will kill every man of them unless they deliver her to us! If a single hair of her head has been hurt, we will show them no mercy!" he cried, leaping on his steed and putting spurs to him.

Away they rushed through the darkness in the direction the bandits had taken. The stage-driver and his passengers were obliged to pursue their journey without knowing the fate of sweet little Cora, or that of the brave young man who had saved their lives, and who had gone back into the very jaws of death with the six hardy trappers who consented to join him, and who had aided them in their time of need.

As they moved away from the scene, they sent up a prayer to Heaven to aid them in their search.

The old stage-driver saw the ladies kneel and heard their prayer, and he shook his head.

After riding mile upon mile without even the slightest clew of the road agents, one of the trappers drew rein.

"This is folly—it is useless to follow up this pursuit,

when every step we take we are probably going miles away."

"If you wish to desert me, I will go my way alone," said Arthur, wheeling about in his saddle.

The trappers held a few moments' conversation consulting with each other.

"We shall have to let you go on your way," said the leader of the little band; "we are obliged to get to the fort. We have saved the passengers of the stage-coach by responding quickly when they called upon us for help. We can not lose more time than we have already lost. Three days or three weeks might be spent in running the bandits down. In all probability we are not strong enough to overpower them. We advise you not to risk your *own* life in what seems to us the maddest of adventures. Farewell, young man."

"Farewell!" said Arthur, bravely. "No doubt you mean well by your advice, but it can not be. I will not give it up without—without finding the girl, if it is in human power!"

It was all speculation on his part as to which way the road agents had gone with Cora. There were no foot-prints on the sand to guide him.

As the trappers had said, it was certainly madness for him to go on without having some idea as to whether he was right or wrong. Cora was in desperate need of his aid; he must not waste any time.

Turning his horse about, he retraced his steps until he overtook the trappers.

"I have been thinking your advice over, gentlemen," he said, "and have concluded you are right. I can not find the young lady unless you aid me. Whatever you think is the wisest plan, I will submit to."

"You have come to a very proper decision," they all agreed. "We were talking the matter over after you left us, and we all concluded that we would not give up the search if we could find the least possible trail to work on."

Arthur grasped their extended hands in thankfulness.

"Together we stand, divided we fall," he murmured. "I will trust to you to aid me—to lay out a plan without delay that will prove successful."

"There is not very much use in undertaking anything until daylight to-morrow," said one of the men. "I have an idea—mind, I call it an idea. I will lay it before you and see what you think of it, boys. Years ago I knew the leader of the road agents. I knew his habits, I knew his ways of life. I am sure it is he who has kidnapped beautiful little Cora Ormsby. He would not be likely to take her to the rendezvous where his rude followers await him, but to a certain traders' post, where he thinks his true character is not known. He would make up some kind of a plausible tale—say that the girl was his sweetheart, has now become insane, or something like that. He would actually make them believe him if he could. I should look there for him first."

"If that is the case, I think you are quite right," declared Arthur. "Search had better be made there first. We will go there, one at a time, and invent a suitable excuse to gain access to the place."

"Not so," returned the other. "I think we had better go direct to the post and tell them why we wish to remain. The traders are our friends."

Arthur readily acquiesced to this.

"Of course it is mere supposition on my part that he

has taken her there. We can only hope that we are on the right trail."

They rode on in silence, mile after mile. Suddenly an exclamation broke from Arthur's lips.

"Look!" he cried, pointing to some tracks in the sand. "I think we have struck the trail at last."

"Sure enough!" echoed one of the others. "These tracks were certainly made by the horse of one of the fleeing road agents. Their horses are never shod. He has not gone to the trading post of which I spoke, I see. He has gone directly across the plains. In that case we can overtake him without much difficulty."

Arthur's face flushed with hope. Without another word, each man wheeled his horse quickly about, and away they flew over the plains without an instant's loss of time.

"Aha!" at length cried one of the men; "unless I am very much mistaken, I see them in the distance."

The men put spurs to their horses and followed in hot pursuit, the dark object ahead of them faintly outlined against the horizon.

As the moments flew by they noticed with satisfaction that they were gaining upon the road agent. They were now so near that they could easily discern the figure of the man. He held the girl before him on the saddle.

"I feel just like shooting him down!" cried Arthur, huskily. "What do you say, gentlemen?"

"That it would be very unwise," replied one. "The bullet might miss its mark and strike the young lady whom you wish to save."

"Yes, yes," murmured Arthur; "you are right. I dare not risk it."

At length the clatter of their horses' hoofs fell upon

the ears of the fleeing bandit. He turned in his saddle and looked over his shoulder, and a mocking laugh fell from his lips. He drew rein and waited until they were within hearing distance, when he cried:

"Advance another step at your peril! If you do, I will shoot the girl!"

CHAPTER LIII.

The threat which the bandit made fairly paralyzed 'Arthur for a moment. He knew that he was dealing with a desperate character, and he dared not risk the consequences.

The road agent saw his advantage and followed it up.

"Turn, every one of you!" he cried. "Advance a step nearer, and I will send a bullet through the girl's heart."

A hoarse cry broke from 'Arthur's lips.

God! what should he do? He dared not imperil Cora's life, and yet he could not retreat.

In an instant an idea occurred to 'Arthur. Why not beat the road agent by strategy.

"I'll use the very means that the road agents have done when they made their attack on the stage-coach."

"We will surround the man," whispered his companion; "each one of us will separate and ride off, and all meet at last together in a circle round him."

"The very thing!" returned one of the trappers. "One would imagine you were an old scout, to think of such a ruse."

"You are going to stand by me, boys?" he said, huskily, riding between them, and laying a hand on each arm.

"Oh, yes," they said, "we will stand by you to the death, if need be."

An expression of great relief crossed his features.

"It is likely that he will change his route quickly," said one of the men, pointing to the retreating road agent.

At that instant the report of a fire-arm fell distinctly upon their ears. Wheeling their horses about, they saw a dark object fall from the horse.

"The fiend has killed her!" shrieked Arthur, standing up in his saddle. "She has fallen! He has put spurs to his horse!"

Before any one could prevent him, he drew his rifle, and a bullet went flying after the swiftly disappearing road agent who was seated on his horse.

"I think I have hit him!" cried Arthur, "though he still rides on."

As the trappers rode up to the fallen figure, they fairly caught their breath in wonder. It was the road agent, and not the girl who was lying there.

"My revolver went off accidentally," he moaned, "and I am done for at last. I had the girl strapped on in front. My horse is running away, and he will dash her to pieces ere consciousness returns, and she be able to manage him. Quick! after her, some of you, if you would save her!"

Arthur needed no second bidding. Given free rein, they all knew that the horse would return to the camp of the road agents, taking with him his helpless victim, who was powerless to extricate herself from the thongs which bound her.

This was a new terror to the trappers. They must bend every energy to overtake the horse and its rider.

The faster they rode the faster the horse on ahead galloped. It seemed impossible to overtake the horse, which was certainly a good one of its kind.

There was but one course left—to shout to Cora, trusting to Heaven that she would hear and recognize his voice.

This he did, but it was useless—useless. The wind was in the opposite direction, and carried the sound of his voice away from her. He was in despair. There was yet one thing left for him to do, and that was to shoot down the horse. He raised his hand, but it was unsteady, and he dared not pull the trigger.

“Hold!” shouted the trappers, lustily, as they overtook him. “Do not fire! We have something better to propose.”

“In God’s name, speak quickly!” cried Arthur, hoarsely. “Every instant imperils both her and us.”

“The girl can not hear your cries. She has swooned—almost any one could tell that.”

Each moment the situation was becoming more desperate.

“Whatever is done must be done at once!” shouted one of the trappers to Arthur. “Fire at the horse, and take the chances. The young lady had better be dead than fall into the hands of the merciless men who form that band. Three minutes more of that gait and she will be in their midst. They outnumber us ten to one. We will all be captured. Shoot down the horse, I say!”

Without another word, Arthur a second time raised his rifle in his trembling hand. He tried to utter a prayer, but the words died on his lips. He took aim and fired.

When the smoke cleared away a shout rose from his companions. The horse had fallen. If the girl was not injured by the fall all would be well.

At that moment, from an opposite direction, they saw a cloud of dust. They had been too late; the road agents had heard the commotion from their camp, and had started out to investigate the matter. They would reach the girl before they could gain her side, that was clearly apparent.

"The man riding ahead is a desperate character," muttered one of the trappers. "I know him well. He is a brother of one of your captains back there at Fort Hadley; his name is Lindsay."

"One of the road agents is a brother of Lindsay?" cried Arthur, aghast. "Which is he? Cora Ormsby must never fall into his hands. I would kill both her and myself first. He would capture her. He knows that his brother loves her?"

It seemed to Arthur that the bitterness of this last blow was more than he could bear. His hand trembled so violently that he could not hold the reins, and they fell from his grasp upon the animal's neck.

It was a lucky movement; for the horse, freed from the restraint of the bit, seemed to gather himself together again, and sprung forward, fairly leaping over the ground.

Thus Arthur and the road agent, with the others at their heels, reached Cora's side at the self-same moment.

"Stop!" thundered Arthur, as the bandit leaped from his saddle. "Attempt to touch that girl, and I fire!"

The road agent had quickly grasped the situation. He knew that his brother had gone to overtake the stage-coach. When his horse came back with the girl strapped

to the saddle, he argued to himself that there was certainly something amiss. The girl must be taken prisoner at all hazards, as well as the trappers who were so foolhardy as to force their way into their retreat.

With a mocking laugh, he raised his rifle.

"Every man of you draw rein!" he cried.

As he uttered the words, a score or more of the bandits burst into view from the rear.

"You want to show fight, eh?" continued the road agent, addressing Arthur. "Well, we'll see what can be done to accommodate you."

At the same moment he discharged the contents of his rifle full at Arthur.

With a cry and groan the hapless young man reeled and fell from his saddle, the blood flowing from a wound in his side.

As it was useless for them to remain and give battle, the trappers did the wisest thing they could do under the circumstances—they beat a hasty retreat, the road agents following them, yelling like demons.

It was fully a week afterward ere Arthur opened his eyes to a knowledge of what was transpiring around him.

To his great amazement, he found himself face to face with Captain Lindsay.

"So you won't die for pure spite, eh?" cried the captain, ironically. "Well, I might have helped you 'shuffle off this mortal coil' during the last two days; but I concluded to let you live and be a witness of what is taking place.

"I see through the whole thing. You took Cora Ormsby from me at the very altar, and you both boarded a stage-coach together, a few miles further on. I sent

word to my brother, and he planned a raid on the coach. How you escaped him in the darkness no one will ever know save yourself. I came on to take possession of the beautiful little Cora.

"You thought you would play me a nice trick by forcing me into a marriage with another girl. Ah! you may look amazed, if you like, pretending you do not know anything about it; but you can not deceive me.

"I could have put you out of the way while you were unconscious, but I concluded to have a better revenge. As soon as you are sufficiently recovered to leave this room, you shall be forced to witness my marriage with Cora, whom I have, safe and sound, under this very roof. I snap my fingers at the other marriage. I shall marry Cora and take her far away from this place."

CHAPTER LIV.

'Arthur Rollins repressed the groan that rose to his lips. He would not let his enemy see how the words cut him to the very heart. He would marry Cora, in spite of all—that's what Captain Lindsay had said; and 'Arthur knew that he would keep his vow if it was within human power.

"I always thought you were a fiend incarnate," he said, huskily; "now I know it!"

Let us return to Cora when she was a passenger on the stage-coach in that never-to-be-forgotten hour.

Amid the handful of fighting defenders that surrounded

the stage-coach, Cora's strained eyes fell upon one who was commanding the heroic little band. She saw that he was making superhuman efforts to baffle the enemy and bring safety to the imperiled ones, even at the cost of his own life.

Her face grew deathly pale at sight of the familiar form, and a swift light flashed into the eyes that were scanning the young soldier so closely.

"Oh, Arthur, it is *you!*" she moaned, wildly—"you have come to protect me in this deadly peril!"

The firing of the enemy and the discharge of answering bullets drowned her voice with its piteous cries.

"They are coming rapidly close to Arthur!" she screamed, wringing her hands, and tottering to the edge of the coach in awful despair. "He must *not* risk his life; he must retreat! I could not live if they killed him!"

A shiver ran over her slight frame as she saw them fling their torches on the stage-coach, then turn and beat a retreat, with the brave men firing volleys of shot in the direction which they had fled.

"Arthur, come, you have saved us!" she cried out, brokenly.

The next instant she had made her way unobserved out of the rear of the coach, and was crouching upon the ground, groping along slowly in the direction where she had last seen Arthur's form.

Cora closed her eyes for an instant to shut out the sight of the leaping flames.

Like one in a dream, she attempted to breast the fiery sea and plunge to Arthur's side, but she found herself imprisoned in a wall of flame.

One moment, one brief moment more of suspense, and

then a step sounded near by. Some one had seen her peril and had come to her rescue before it was too late. Some one was by her side—the short, stout figure of a man, with a dark slouch hat drawn over his face, concealing his features. He wrapped a shawl about her. A pair of stout arms held her closely, and she felt herself borne swiftly away in an opposite direction from the burning stage-coach—further and further away into the night and the darkness.

He mounted a horse which was in waiting, and, despite her frantic efforts to free herself, they traveled further away from the exciting scene, on through the heart of the forest, finally emerging into a well-traversed road that led to the nearest traders' post.

As soon as she could tear off the shawl that enveloped her head, she cried out to stop, her little hands tugging desperately at the reins.

The bandit paid no heed to her tearful entreaties to stop, but urged the steed onward, cursing and warning the girl to desist. And thus the first hour passed that followed the thrilling scene.

Maddened and terrified by the awful peril that surrounded her, Cora made one more desperate effort to release herself.

In an unguarded moment the poor girl sprung forward, and attempted to leap to the ground over which they were swiftly flying.

The bandit realized that she was slipping from him, and in an instant of time a new resolve came to him.

It was not safe to run any further risk. He must secure the girl more firmly or perhaps lose her.

There was not an instant to be lost, he told himself.

"We will halt here, my young lady," he said, mock-

ingly, "and I will arrange your mode of travel a little differently."

"Take me to my home," she pleaded, "and I will never cease to thank you, and forgive your cowardly act."

"I have had too much trouble in securing you to do so foolish a thing," he answered, firmly.

"There is only one motive, my pretty young lady," he answered, with a poor attempt at chivalry. "Your face has moved my heart with its fatal beauty, until I longed to capture you. My sole object is to make you my bride, which I intend to do just as soon as we reach yon trading post, which is not two miles distant. If you consent to marry me without making an unpleasant scene, you will be glad in the end. You will have all the love and riches which a bandit can give you. There is good blood running through my veins. I am the only brother of Captain Lindsay, now stationed at Fort Hadley."

"How cruel and wicked you are to snatch me from my friends, and from one whom I love better than my own life. Nothing you can say or do will ever make me become your wife. I would die on the rack first. If there is one spark of human feeling or of pity in your heart, I beg that you will release me. You will find me unflinching in my hatred toward you. I will never live to be your bride, mark my words. I despise you, your face is an insult to me; even your voice I loath beyond words, for your cowardice."

As they galloped along, and came in sight of the post at length, Cora tried to scream, to cry out. Her ashen lips parted, but no sound came from them. The faintness of death seemed to envelop her; she felt that she could hold out no longer; merciful unconsciousness was fast stealing over her.

When she opened her eyes to what was going on around her, she found herself resting upon a couch, with Captain Lindsay sitting by smoking a cigar.

"I wish you a very good-day, Miss Ormsby," he said, as she started to her feet with a low cry. "After playing that very nice little trick upon me, you fled from me with your lover's connivance; but you see I have captured you after all. You are at my mercy, and furthermore, your handsome Mr. Rollins, too, is at my mercy, a prisoner in this camp. I have just left him, after informing him that he is soon to witness my marriage with you. The agony on his face was a glorious revenge to me, for he loves you. He cried out that death would be easier for him to bear than that."

He was startled and amazed to hear Cora exclaim:

"Heaven be praised!—Arthur loves me still!"

CHAPTER LV.

He left the tent; but there was a look on his face as he turned away that haunted Cora.

Where was she? she wondered, struggling weakly upon her elbow. She knew that she was in the hands of the road agents; but she must make her escape.

Surely the people in the stage-coach would soon miss her, band together, and make a search for her. But 'Arthur, her brave and noble defender, who had done his best to save her and the stage-coach passengers, ah! where was he?

Was it indeed true that he had fallen a victim to them? She would not believe that they had captured him until the last moment.

While she was pondering over the matter, there was a slight commotion outside the tent.

"You can not come in!" cried Cora. "Stay out!"

"I am sorry to disobey a lady's commands," returned Captain Lindsay's voice from without, "but in this case it can not be helped."

He swept back the folds of canvas that served as a door-way, and entered the tent. Cora's eyes dilated with anger; she was white to the lips.

How dared he intrude like this? She felt the insecurity of her position, and was filled with a nameless terror.

"I want you to come to the door of the tent," he said. "There is a sight here that may possibly interest you."

"Nothing could interest me!" exclaimed the girl, haughtily.

"Suspend your opinion until you have seen," he exclaimed, fairly dragging her out of the tent. "Look!" he cried, exultantly, turning her sharply about. "I told you that I could show you something that would perhaps make you change your opinion in regard to your marrying me."

One glance, and it seemed to Cora that the blood had left her body. Scarcely a dozen rods from where she stood she beheld Arthur Rollins.

Yes, it was Arthur, bound firmly to a tree with heavy thongs, and but a few feet from him were two men with their rifles pointed directly at his heart.

"Hush! Do not scream or cry out," commanded Captain Lindsay; "if you do, they will fire on the instant."

Otherwise, they will await my command. One word from you will save Arthur Rollins' life; refuse, and his life shall pay the forfeit. You have but five minutes to make up your mind. If you say, 'Yes,' the ceremony will be performed here and now; if you say 'No,' I will simply give the order to fire, and I shall force you to witness it."

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried the girl; "you could not be so inhuman! You will not force me to do anything like that!"

"I do not wish you to witness it; it will be your own desire if you do. You can save him if you will, or execute him if you desire. It all rests with you, my dear girl."

It seemed to Cora that she was dying. Had this man no mercy, no pity?

He took out a cigar and lighted it, flung away the burned-out match, then, with a nonchalance which drove her to desperation, he took out his watch.

Her eyes followed the movement with a pent-up agony that was too great for words.

She tried to cry out, but her lips made no sound. She seemed to realize that time was passing.

One, two, three minutes sped by on lightning wings—four minutes! Oh, death in life! Was there anything more pitiful to bear than the awful suspense—the horrible torture which was killing her by degrees?

"One-half minute more," said Captain Lindsay, deliberately; "if you have anything to say, say it quickly."

"Save him—oh, save him, at any cost!" screamed Cora, wildly. "I—I will marry you, you inhuman torturer, if that will buy him life!"

"Lower your weapons, gentlemen; the captive is res-

pited," called Captain Lindsay, in an authoritative voice. "He owes his life to you, my dear Cora," he said. "He should thank Heaven for sending him in *his* hour of need so valiant a friend as you proved yourself to be. You know the remainder of the proviso—and that is, that you marry me on the spot."

Cora tried to utter a single word, but all utterance failed her entirely.

For *his* sake she would endure everything.

Another gaze, that seemed to carry her soul with it, and she turned away, Captain Lindsay escorting her back to the tent.

"One hour from now," he said, as she passed within. "Does that suit you, Cora?"

"Go away!" she cried out, haughtily. "Why are you pacing up and down before the tent?"

"My object should certainly be apparent to you," he answered, calmly. "On the other occasion when you were to have wedded me you played a most cruel prank upon me. If you want anything, call me."

Captain Lindsay threw himself down full length, and gave himself up to brilliant plans for the future.

He never could tell afterward just how it came about—his head sunk lower on his arm, his eyes drooped, the world seemed to fade slowly from him, and one of the men who was passing by a few moments later noticed that Captain Lindsay was sound asleep.

Arthur Rollins saw it, too, from the tree to which he was bound.

Ah, if he could but rescue Cora! The very thought seemed to rend his soul from his body. The man who stood a few feet from him, watching him intently, broke the awful stillness at length by saying:

"I feel sorry for you, young fellow. It's a mighty hard thing to be tied to a tree and watch the ceremony which makes the girl you love the wife of another man, being powerless to help it."

"Yes, it is more terrible than death," said Arthur. Strong man as he was, his lips quivered, and the tears he could not well restrain came to his eyes. "Is there not some way that you could help me to escape," whispered Arthur, "and—and aid me to take that young girl with me?"

The man shook his head.

"I would not dare do it!" he exclaimed. "My own life would pay the penalty if I did. But I'll tell you what I'll do."

CHAPTER LVI.

Arthur Rollins leaned forward with breathless intensity.

"I will tell you what I *can* do to help you," said the man; "I can assist that young girl in leaving that tent, if that will be any good, as she could walk right over Captain Lindsay's body, and he'd never know it, he sleeps so soundly. The only trouble is, that the rest of the men would know it. You see, I don't like this kind of business, stranger. I was pressed into this business by the road agents, because I was useful to them. I mean to break away at the earliest opportunity."

"Help her, and Heaven will reward you!" cried Ar-

thur. "If I knew that that sweet young girl was out of danger, I can tell you that it would matter little what became of me. Why, I would give a hundred lives, if I had them, to save her, she is so dear to me!"

A moment later the young road agent had circled the ground all unnoticed by his companions, until he found himself in the rear of the tent which Captain Lindsay was guarding.

Dropping quickly upon his hands and knees, he raised one little corner of the tent, whispering at the same time in a low, shrill voice:

"Hush! Do not cry out, Miss Ormsby; I am your friend!"

Cora watched the brown hand in terror too great for words.

What did it mean? Was this a friend or foe who cautioned her not to cry out? She was surrounded by so many foes that she distrusted every one around her.

"I would like to have you come closer, please. I have a message to give you from Mr. Arthur Rollins. I am his friend and yours—you may believe me. Have no fear, lady. You must come nearer, that I may whisper my message," he went on. "Remember that I will do you no harm."

Slowly, with a palpitating heart, Cora crept toward the opening, fairly holding her breath in terror.

"Take this bundle," went on the same voice from the outside, "and array yourself in these clothes; they are mine. When you are ready, call me; but remember that every moment is precious."

Ten minutes, and the answer came back:

"I—I have done as you directed me."

A sharp knife quickly pierced the canvas of the tent, and the next instant an aperture was made that was large enough to admit of her passing through it.

"Good!" cried the young man when his eyes fell on her—"you look so much like one or two of the boys who often come here, that you will have no difficulty in passing as one or other of them."

"But, Arthur," cried Cora, in dismay, "what has become of him? Where is *he*? Have you already helped him to get away from these terrible people?"

"I—I dare not!" murmured the young man, repeating the words. "If I did, my life would pay the forfeit."

"Then I will share his fate," cried Cora. "Oh, sir, if you would be kind to us two, let us both die in each other's arms and end all our misery."

He shook his head.

"Go!" he exclaimed, "while there is an opportunity for you to gain your freedom; make the most of it, I say!"

At that same moment Cora's eyes fell upon Arthur, who was still bound securely to the tree.

Quick as thought an idea came to her. Like a flash she caught up the knife which the young man had used to make the opening in the tent, and in a trice she was at Arthur's side, and the cruel thongs were severed.

The young road agent fairly gasped for breath as he saw Arthur leap to the girl's side.

They would surely tie him to the stake in Rollins' place, and in less time than it takes to tell it, his body would be riddled with bullets.

He did not take an instant longer to consider his position; he dared not make an outcry, and he would not if he could.

There was but one course to pursue, and that was to accept Arthur Rollins' proposition to flee with them.

Before they could remonstrate with him, he hurried back to the tent which Cora had so lately quitted.

"Do you think he will prove false?" cried Cora, in much fear.

"We must not trust him; he may prove treacherous. That is our safest plan. If our fears are without foundation, so much the better."

At last they were among the tall trees that hid them quite out of sight. Then, and not until then, did Arthur dare catch Cora in his arms and kiss her—ay, madly kiss the blue eyes, golden hair, and red, quivering lips.

"Thank God, we are out of their clutches!" he cried. "But we are not safe yet. We will have to run for our lives, my darling Cora!"

CHAPTER LVII.

Captain Lindsay's deep sleep lasted for two hours. It seemed to those who passed by that it was the sleep of exhaustion; yet no one dared awaken him, as he had always given strict orders to that effect. His companions laughed and chatted loudly as they sauntered past him, and stopped at the spot where he lay, muttering incoherent words. Finally he woke with a start, sat up, and looked around him.

"What a horrible dream I had!" he said, rubbing his brow and looking curiously about him. "I am not a man

to be haunted by presentiments of any kind, but somehow there is a feeling of impending evil which I can not shake off."

With a convulsive shudder the captain rose to his feet, and peered anxiously toward the tent where he had left Cora. One, two hours had elapsed, and she was, perhaps, ready and waiting for the eventful ceremony to take place, no doubt, wondering at his strange absence, and thinking that perhaps he was not going to put in an appearance, after all.

Noiselessly he walked past the entrance of the little tent. There was no sound from within—nothing to tell him that she was awaiting the bridegroom to be.

Wondering as to what course he had better pursue, he drew near the entrance of the tent, one corner of which was flung back.

He could see the folds of her dress, which hung over a chair, where she had evidently laid it, and the thought occurred to him that the girl had in all probability grown tired of her monotonous surroundings, and had thrown herself down on the little couch that had been improvised for her comfort, and that she was enjoying the sleep of forgetfulness.

He made up his mind that he would not disturb her for at least a little while longer. One hour more or less would not matter.

How long he paced up and down before the tent, the impatient captain never remembered afterward.

A young boy who served in the capacity of waiter and messenger came up to him, and touching his hat respectfully, stood awaiting orders.

"Jamie," said the captain, displaying more good-humor than he had shown toward the youth for a long

time, "I want you to take along your best manners, and stop at the young lady's tent yonder and call out in your blindest voice: 'The captain sends his compliments to you, miss, and begs that you will tell him if there is anything that he can do for you, and how long before you wish the ceremony performed.' Don't forget anything; remember every word, you young rascal!"

Thus admonished, the lad started off to do his bidding. He called at the tent softly, then louder and louder, and received no response.

Scarcely daring to come back to his master without a reply of some kind, he took the liberty upon himself of thrusting his head in through the aperture that had been made in the canvas.

One quick, penetrating glance, and the situation was clear to him. The occupant of the place had gone, leaving a dress near the door.

Slowly he made his way back to where his master was awaiting him, and stood hesitatingly before him, nervously twirling his hat in his hand.

"Well, you are back again almost before I expected you. Of course she sent me a pleasant answer, the sweet girl!" said the captain, cheerily, a broad smile lighting up his stern face.

"Nuthin' of the sort, sir. That's too good news, cap'n."

"Eh? Stop meddling so familiarly with my affairs, or I'll see that you are put where you belong, I say. Come, what did she say? Out with it, without any of your 'hems' or 'haws.'"

"There's trouble o' some sort in thar, cap'n," he went on, glibly. "I hollered and hollered to the young miss I thought was in yonder. Finally suthin' tempted me to

jes' poke my head in at a rent I foun' had been made back of the tent."

"Well—well; go on—what then?" thundered the officer as he caught the boy's shoulder and held it in a painful grip.

A look of uneasiness overspread the youth's features, and for an instant he dared not answer, lest he should arouse the wrath of the irate captain.

Finally he summoned up courage to proceed, and went on agitatedly:

"I peered all around, and there wasn't a solitary living person inside that tent. Nuffin but jes' a dress lying thar near the door. You can see that for yourself, cap'n."

In a trice the captain made a spring into the tent. One glance showed him the truth. Cora Ormsby was not there. For the second time she had outwitted him, and with a savage cry of rage he turned toward the place where he had left Arthur Rollins. He, too, was gone, and that, too, from beneath his very eyes.

The shout which he uttered gathered all the road agents around him.

"These people have both given me the slip!" he cried. "Quick! to horse, and overtake them, for they will have every member of the garrison around us in no time."

Suddenly it dawned upon them that they were refusing to take orders from him. For the first time since they had been banded together there were signs of mutiny among the men.

"Are you so blind, men, that you can not see your own danger?" he cried.

"We see danger ahead if we follow where you lead!" they cried out, doggedly. "All you want is to follow up the girl, no matter about us!"

"This is not a time for you to get up such nonsensical notions!" he cried. "Every man to horse, and keep those two from getting to Fort Hadley at all hazards."

As before, not a man moved.

"Then I will undertake it myself!" he cried, springing into the saddle with a fierce determination of overtaking them.

"We will not trust you to leave us!" cried one, grasping the bridle of his horse.

"Dare you detain me?" he cried.

"It looks a little bit like it, doesn't it?" he cried.

Quick as a flash he drew a revolver from his pocket and shot the man dead, then dug his spurs into the animal's side.

He fairly mowed his way through their midst.

The animal he had chosen was a fiery one, and his frantic plunges and mad leaps threatened to unseat him.

A moment later he was lost to sight. He followed in the direction which the fugitives must have taken.

There were two shots left in his rifle. Rather than have them escape him now, he would not hesitate to shoot them both down.

A cry of triumph broke from his lips, as, looking ahead, he beheld them ascending the hill not far away.

But instead of two forms there were three, as near as he could make out.

The sudden confusion which the sight of the dark forms brought to him came very near causing him to change the dark plot of vengeance which he had formed in his mind.

"It can not be that I am mistaken. This is the only route that they could possibly have taken to gain the

fort, which they would soon be able to do if left to themselves. But I must not lose time in idle conjectures; I will redouble my horse's speed, and in a short time overtake them. Yet, what I shall do with those two men whom I should make prisoners of, baffles my judgment completely. If I could overpower them, bind and gag them, then return with Cora to camp, those unruly fellows might come to my rescue and bring them back to our retreat again. I shall stand no fooling this time when I have them safe as prisoners, but I will see that they are shot down as traitors are punished!" he muttered to himself.

"Now is my time," thought Captain Lindsay, a fiendish smile playing about his lips. He raised his rifle to his shoulder and took aim at Arthur. But oh! unlucky shot, to his horror he saw that his aim had gone wide of the mark; the slim figure threw up its arms and fell face downward.

CHAPTER LVIII.

With a great cry, Arthur Rollins faced about.

"Who fired that shot?" he cried.

"I—I think I am done for!" cried the young road agent, for it was he who had received the shot instead of Cora. "They are on our trail; do the best you can to escape them. My prayers, if they avail anything, will be with you. Ah! it is Captain Lindsay!" he cried in the same breath. "I knew it; but the men are not with

him," he added, faintly; "he is alone. Here, take my revolver and rifle, young man; you may need them."

Those were the most sorrowful words he ever uttered. His head fell forward, and there was a smile on his lips, and they knew that all would soon be over with him.

"Go your way, and never mind me," he whispered. "You could do nothing for me, and time is precious, with those rascals on your track. Go! Leave me!"

Realizing that he was beyond human skill, and that loitering there only meant danger to themselves, Cora and Arthur pushed onward; but they had scarcely taken a dozen steps forward ere another report rang out on the air, so near to Arthur that he could hear the whiz of the bullet as it flew past his cheek.

Cora could utter no word. She had seen so much of danger that she was becoming inured to it. But it seemed to her that she had reached the height of human happiness, being with Arthur for those brief moments. Her energy had worked wonders for her. His very presence, too, seemed to exhilarate her, his words of encouragement to keep her from falling by the way-side.

"We are within two miles of the nearest fort, Cora," he said to her, "and when once there our troubles will soon be over. Do you think you have strength enough to reach it?"

"Yes," she answered. "Where thou leadest I can follow."

At that moment they espied a group of horsemen coming down upon them. One glance, and a cry of joy broke from Arthur's lips.

"Thank God! it is some of the cavalry from Fort Hadley. Heaven be praised, we are saved!"

This proved to be the case, and Cora's intense joy knew no bounds.

Drawing his handkerchief from his breast-pocket, Arthur waved it vigorously. Cora sat down upon a fallen log, and, woman-like, sobbed as though her heart would break now that the worst danger seemed over.

A moment more and the cavalry had reached their side. To find Arthur Rollins there, and Cora Ormsby, the old general's daughter by his side, in male attire, fairly took their breath away.

Before Arthur could explain the situation, Captain Lindsay, fairly covered with dust, rushed up.

"Hold, men!" he shouted, dashing into the midst of the cavalry. "I have tracked down Arthur Rollins, the deserter. It was he who abducted our old general's lovely daughter. I command you to shoot him down on the spot, as we always shoot down deserters!"

"No, no!" cried Cora; "it is false! Listen to me: Mr. Arthur Rollins has saved me from that traitor yonder," pointing to Lindsay.

"Gentlemen," broke in the captain, "I may as well tell the truth still further. Not only has that miserable deserter yonder abducted the girl whom we all loved at the fort, but he has succeeded in hypnotizing her as well. Death is too good for him. You all know that she was to be my bride, and what happened. Do not hesitate in obeying the orders of your commanding officer. Shoot him down as you would the veriest reptile by the roadside, as you swore to do when you took the oath of the army. To arms! Ready!"

And then, to Cora's great surprise and terror, every man slowly raised his rifle, and pointed it directly at Arthur Rollins.

"For God's sake, wait!" pleaded Cora Ormsby, falling before them, and raising her white hands supplicatingly to Heaven. "Stop! on your life—I beg!" screamed the girl, as the men waited for the order to aim.

"Do not mind her!" reiterated the irate captain. "I tell you, follow my instructions at once!" This without paying the least regard to the supplicating figure of the girl who was making such frantic efforts to save the life of her lover.

Waving her away, the leader of the troop signified his intention to his men to carry out the captain's orders, and open fire upon young Rollins without delay.

There was a fixed look upon the men's faces which could not for a moment be misinterpreted; and Cora read determination in their eyes, which roused the poor girl to the highest pitch of action, that became almost one of frenzy.

Once again she gathered her scattered senses, and quick as the dart of a meteor, Cora threw herself, with a mighty bound, in front of Arthur Rollins just as the click of the triggers were resounding.

In less time than it takes to tell it, they had each comprehended the awful peril in which she had thrown herself, and the bullets that had been intended for Arthur Rollins were discharged over his head.

"Thank God!" murmured the girl, hysterically. "I—I—have saved him!"

Captain Lindsay jumped forward with tigerish agility.

"Fire again!" he cried, seizing the girl by the arm and thrusting her aside.

"Gentlemen!" cried Arthur Rollins, pale as death, "let me have your attention for one brief moment. Re-

member that I once led you on to victory; remember that I faced the deadly arrows in advance of you. I did not fear death then; I am the same man to-day. I do not fear death. But I do wish justice. I—I ask you, as a man among men, to take me before the proper tribunal at Fort Hadley, and let me stand trial, and I promise you that I will abide by the decision rendered. No matter what this man charges me with, let me prove my innocence, or stand by the consequences!”

“That is only fair!” cried the men in chorus. “Let us give him a chance to prove his innocence, especially as there is a doubt in our minds!”

“Agreed! agreed!” cried every man.

As Captain Lindsay listened, his face grew livid with rage.

He saw what the outcome of it would be—that he would stand no show when the truth was known. He resolved at once upon a bold piece of strategy.

“I am perfectly willing, men, that he should be taken back to Fort Hadley and placed on trial,” he said, much to the surprise of Arthur Rollins and the other men.

“Fall in line!” said the commander of the troops.

Each soldier obeyed the order. No one noticed that Captain Lindsay himself fell back, taking his position directly behind Arthur Rollins.

There was a wicked gleam in his eyes that might have warned them of approaching danger had they but seen it; but there was nothing to tell them of what was to happen in the near future.

A mile or even more the party traveled in silence. Two of the soldiers had offered their horses to the general’s daughter and her companion, while Captain Lind-

say had mounted the extra horse, which they generally took with them in case of emergency.

Every step he journeyed Captain Lindsay was busy thinking over a plan which he had laid out to accomplish his diabolical purpose at the first opportunity that presented itself.

Cora had kept up her courage until now by a super-human effort; but at last an oppression stole over her which she could not shake off.

She wished that Captain Lindsay would ride in front of them; she would not feel quite so uneasy then.

She whispered her fears to Arthur, but he quickly reassured her that she had nothing to fear—he would not dare prove treacherous. But with a woman's instinct, Cora did not feel at all sure of this.

“He will bear watching,” she thought, quite nervously.

Once or twice, when she had turned round unexpectedly, she noticed that Captain Lindsay was watching Arthur with a terrible gleam in his eyes.

He made the attempt to shoot Arthur once before, and she had saved him. She felt that he would resort to some other treachery the first chance that he should find.

Cora had been so persistent in openly declaring that there was impending danger hovering round her lover, that she had not, in her excitement, taken the precaution to whisper in a low voice, so that none but Arthur himself would hear her.

A young soldier who was riding along on the other side of the general's daughter heard the words as they fell from the lips of the frightened girl, although he had not intended to play the part of eavesdropper in the lovers' conversation.

He was startled by the earnestness of her appeal to him, and he made up his mind that he would keep a strict lookout for any danger that might menace them.

He had not long to wait. He soon observed Captain Lindsay's eyes slowly but stealthily cover Arthur Rollins.

Quick as a flash he put himself between them, pretending that it was his horse's careerings. He met Captain Lindsay's eye, and in that instant the captain knew that his plan was well known to this man, and that he would frustrate it if he possibly could.

That Arthur Rollins should never reach Fort Hadley, he was determined.

It maddened him, too, to see how Cora clung to his rival, not so much as deigning to notice him by so much as a glance. He saw then and there that the girl was as good as lost to him, and realizing this, he grew desperate.

The soldier continued to ride directly between him and Arthur, but there was no one between him and Cora. A terrible thought came to him. Should he let the girl live to marry his rival? No! a thousand times no! The very thought was gall and wormwood to him.

There was but one alternative—to end her life and his own then and there. Yes, he would do it.

He raised his rifle, took deliberate aim at Cora, and fired!

CHAPTER LIX.

There was a shout and a cry simultaneously with the report from Captain Lindsay's rifle. It was not Cora that fell, it was the gallant young soldier who sprung forward just in time to save her, receiving in his own breast the death-dealing bullet that had been intended for the young girl.

In a moment the greatest excitement prevailed among the soldiers. A dozen strong pairs of hands grasped him. Ere he could pull the trigger to fire the second shot, he was surrounded and fairly dragged from his horse amid the greatest confusion.

Cora and Arthur were so startled that they could not speak. They could only look at each other with terror-stricken eyes.

"Do not fear," said one of the soldiers, "he shall not have an opportunity to hurt you, miss. He realizes that."

There was the greatest excitement at Fort Hadley when the party arrived there.

The astonishment of every one at seeing Captain Lindsay a prisoner, and handcuffed, knew no bounds.

Captain Lindsay saw that he was in a terrible predicament, and he made up his mind that he must do something to help himself before their fury reached the highest pitch.

"Hold, comrades! I have been wronged by yonder man!" he cried out, hoarsely. "I am the one who has just need to complain, Heaven above knows!"

It was the talk of the whole fort for the next few hours.

Secretly every one believed Arthur to be in the right and Captain Lindsay in the wrong.

Lyle Warner was overjoyed at seeing Arthur Rollins' face again, but her deep hatred of Cora knew no bounds.

She could have raised her white hands and slain her then and there.

As Captain Lindsay was being led away, his glance fell upon Joe, the half-breed, standing back, almost hidden among the group, watching what was taking place.

He made a rapid sign to him. The man only nodded; but they seemed to understand each other plainly, and the dark frown cleared from Captain Lindsay's face, and in its place a gleam of triumph which he tried hard to conceal.

The half-breed watched carefully to see what disposition was made of Captain Lindsay.

"I will liberate him in good time," he said to himself. "He shall gain possession of the girl for me, and when that is done I shall take her from him."

It did not take Captain Lindsay long to realize how affairs were turning. If he could only keep the inquiry up until dusk, perhaps Joe, the half-breed, would be there. And then—ah! well, something so startling would happen, that the men who sat there waiting to convict him would wish they had never been born.

At that very moment he caught sight of the half-breed, and he could scarcely restrain his look of triumph.

Again that look, accompanied by a nod, which told the captain that all was ready for carrying out their plans.

The next instant a terrible cry rang through the fort.

"To arms! Every man! The Indians are upon us!"

The committee who were in charge of the case were fairly paralyzed for a moment.

"Let me lead you on to victory or death!" cried Arthur Rollins, springing to his feet.

Suddenly there was the report of a rifle, and the next instant, without a moan or cry, Captain Lindsay, who was seated just in front of Arthur, fell to the floor.

Half-breed Joe, for it was his work, uttered a cry of terror. In his excitement he had killed the wrong man, then turned and fled.

CHAPTER LX.

Upon Captain Lindsay's person was found the proof of his guilt in the shape of letters to be sent to his brother, the road agent, informing him just what time the stages were expected to pass a certain point, and if they carried valuables or not. Getting rid of such a dangerous person was the occasion of much rejoicing at the fort, where Captain Lindsay had never been liked by his brother officers.

There was only one person who did not rejoice at the termination of affairs, and that was Lyle Warner.

The news that Arthur and Cora were to be wedded, was more bitter than death to her, for she still loved Arthur Rollins—loved him as only a girl like Lyle can love—with all the mad strength of her heart. She could

not witness the marriage; she had set her mind upon its not taking place.

On the day which was to see Cora his bride she suddenly disappeared. When search was made for her, they found the body of beautiful Lyle in the creek a few rods from the fort.

At first they thought it an accident, but a slip of paper found in her pocket told its own story. It contained but a few words, in which she left all her property, which her Aunt Bitterwood had bequeathed her, to Arthur.

At first he refused to accept it; but when they all assured him that he was in duty bound to do so for Cora's sake, that it was General Ormsby's property anyhow, and that it would be cruel to deprive his only daughter of her rights, he had no choice but to accept.

At this juncture a large sealed packet arrived from Washington, directed to Arthur Rollins. Opening it with much curiosity, Arthur found that it was a commission which had been bestowed upon him for his bravery in leading the men to victory in the great Indian outbreak, the account of which had startled the whole country a short time before. He took it to Cora and laid it in her hands.

"Shall I accept, darling?" he whispered. "You know what it means—a life of peril and hardship. With you by my side I could face anything."

Cora nestled closer to her broad-shouldered soldier-lover.

"Do not accept the commission, Arthur," she said. "Let us get back to civilization; I have had enough of life on the frontier."

That was how Arthur happened to refuse the commission.

A week later their marriage took place. It was the happiest event that had ever occurred at Fort Hadley, and they talked about it for many and many a day afterward—how lovely the bride looked, and how brave and gallant the bridegroom appeared; how devoted they were to each other; what a happy life they would be sure to lead. Every member of the fort banded together and shook their hands, wishing them Godspeed.

With the marriage of our hero and heroine, we must conclude our narrative, for what more pleasing *finale* can a story have than the love which ends in marriage and happiness at last?

THE END.

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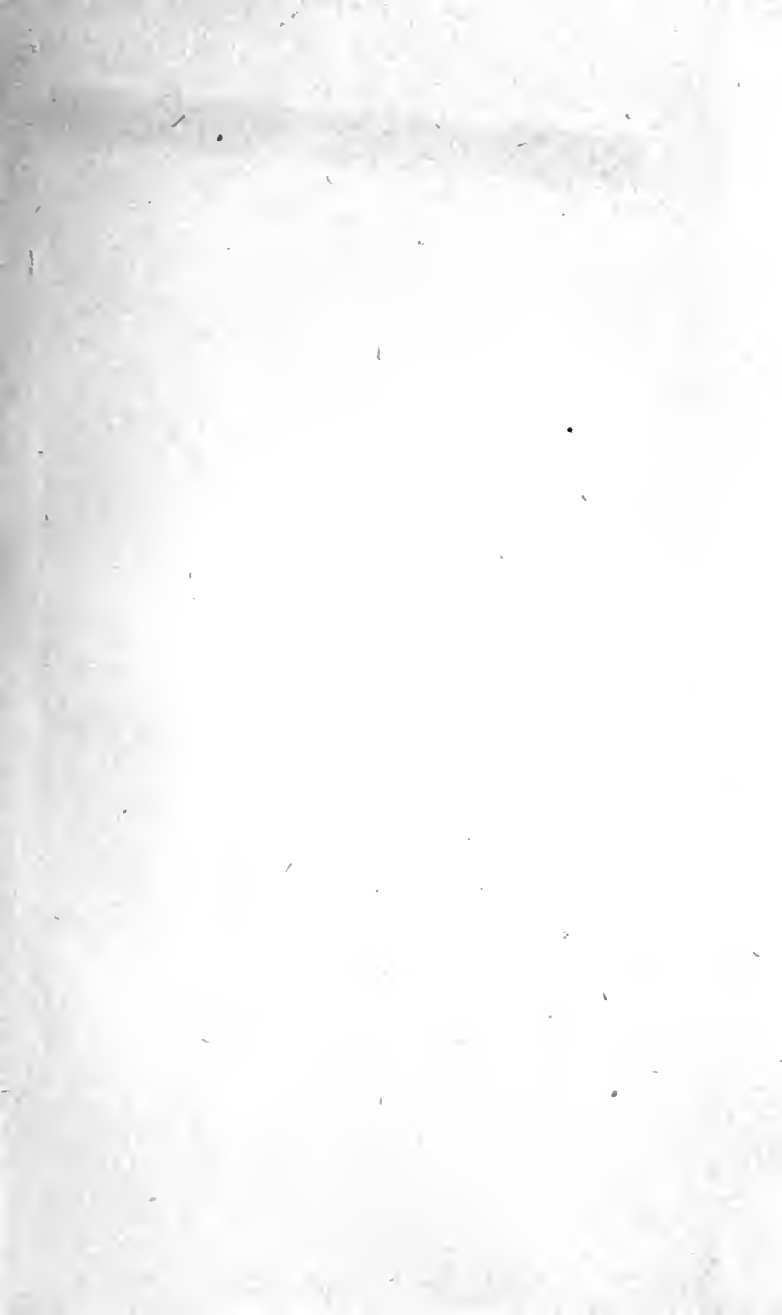
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